DRAMATIC PORTRAITS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE REPERTORY THEATRE

J. M. SYNGE: A CRITICAL STUDY

UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME

PEOPLE AND QUESTIONS. By G. S. STREET

DRAMATIC PORTRAITS

BY P. P. HOWE

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A critic should be taught to criticize a work of art without making any reference to the personality of the author. This, in fact, is the beginning of criticism.

WILDE: A Letter on "Dorian Gray"

Every man's work, whether it be literature or music or pictures or architecture or anything else, is always a portrait of himself.

BUTLER: "The Way of All Flesh"

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NOTE

Throughout this book a particular point of view has been adhered to, a point of view from which the dramatic art is looked upon as a separate art from the literary, and from which especial attention is given to the manner of its practice. Thus, the works of nearly all the dramatists passed under review are to be read —a complete list of the books will be found in the Bibliography at the end—but I have spoken of them, as far as possible, in terms of their presentation in the theatre.

Four of the chapters first appeared in the *Fortnightly Review*, and I wish to make to the Editor of that periodical full acknowledgment of his courtesy.

P. P. H.

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I

ARTHUR PINERO

IN the third act of the thirty-third play of Sir Arthur Pinero, we read :

HILARY. Come, Mrs. Filmer ! Let us believe, if we can—if it makes us better, and gentler, and more merciful ! —let us believe that in all this there was the hand of God !

NINA [*harshly*]. Very well ; let us believe it. [*Looking him in the face defiantly and measuring her words.*] Only we must believe equally that it's the hand of God that has brought these letters from their hiding-place and has delivered them to me.

Since this is to be an inquiry into drama, and not an inquiry into theology or philosophy, we must assume at the outset that it was not the hand of God that caused the first Mrs. Filmer Jesson and her lover to write incriminating letters to one another while they were in the same house, that caused her to store them behind the loose boarding in a cupboard in her boudoir, that killed her in a carriage accident, and that delivered the letters three years later into the possession of her successor ; but the hand of Sir Arthur Pinero. The

drama must have reality, but the first essential to our understanding of an art is that we should not believe it to be actual life. The spectator who shouts his warning and advice to the heroine when the villain is approaching is, in the theatre, the only true believer in the hand of God ; and he is liable to find it in a drama lower than the best. Let us believe that it is the hand of Sir Arthur Pinero we are to talk about. And let us, for the moment, place on one side the fourteen or fifteen farces and comic plays, from *The Schoolmistress* and *The Magistrate* to *A Wife without a Smile* and *Preserving Mr. Panmure.* No one would think of looking for the hand of God in these.

An inquiry into the serious art of this dramatist is an inquiry into upwards of thirty years of the English theatre. The work of Sir Arthur Pinero's prentice hand is shrouded in an obscurity which one must believe to be deliberate. The present generation may know only of *Daisy's Escape* and *Bygones* as dwelling "as happy blendings of humour and pathos" in the memory of Mr. William Archer, a critic of the period. We must rest content to call them bygones, these.

With a third play, *Hester's Mystery*, the hand of Sir Arthur Pinero comes into the light. It is a play in one act, with a "rural setting" and "rustic dialogue," of the stage. There is a nice young man causing great mystery at the farm of Hester's mother, because he is so obviously

superior to the common labourers. Hester comes home from school, very bright and cheerful. A sinister schoolmaster comes after her, and threatens, if she does not reward his base love, to tell her mother that she has not been to school for seven weeks. This is Hester's mystery. She defies the base schoolmaster, takes the nice young man by the hand, and a baby is produced from somewhere. Hester and the nice young man were married a year ago. Hester's mother cries into the cot, and apologizes to the baby for the hard things she has said. Mr. Archer thought the little play "dealt with a rather dangerous theme, but dealt with it cleverly." This was in the year when the European theatre was giving its attention to the theme of "Ghosts," and finding it enjoyable.

Sir Arthur Pinero's next rural drama was *The Squire,* in which certain people thought they detected an unacknowledged debt to the hand of Mr. Thomas Hardy, probably on insufficient evidence.[1] About this time Mr. Archer gave it as his opinion that "a little study of French methods, without diminishing Mr. Pinero's originality, would be almost certain to improve his form."

Lords and Commons was a play about a young

[1] Since this play is not included in Sir Arthur Pinero's printed works, it is not possible to say whether it was better than the play Mr. Hardy himself made from the novel "Far from the Madding Crowd," or not so good.

gentleman who married a girl of lower degree, and had to part from her on the wedding-day because he discovered that her mother and father had not been married. The hand of a Scandinavian novelist assisted the dramatist to this play. Mr. Archer confessed that he left the theatre on the first night " with a feeling of pleasant exhilaration. The play seemed to me healthy and earnest in tone, entertaining in detail. The dialogue I thought admirable."

The Hobby Horse was a play about a racing man who left his wife a good deal alone, so that she engaged in good works in the East End of London under an assumed name, and allowed a curate to fall in love with her. When the curate found out the truth he was much shaken. " Perhaps the *Hobby Horse*," wrote the critic who introduced the play in its printed form, " in its defiance of the conventional demand for wholesale conjugal happiness in the last act, though an ample supply was conceded, was a little before its time."

Sweet Lavender was a play about a young man in chambers in the Temple who fell in love with his landlady's daughter. A barrister friend, who was unfortunate enough to be frequently drunk, smoothed over every difficulty for them and proved himself to be really a most charming fellow. When it happens to come out that the young man's guardian in his youth himself fell in love with a landlady's daughter, and that she

is this very identical landlady, and that her daughter is his daughter, he is very sorry for the wrong he has done, and an ample supply of conjugal happiness is conceded. The dramatist of *Sweet Lavender* was, said Mr. William Archer, " the master of our contemporary stage, the only writer (Mr. Gilbert, perhaps, excepted) whose work showed intellectual grip and originality, combined with thorough literary craftsmanship."

The Weaker Sex was a play about an American poet, who proves to be some one else, whom a mother falls in love with—one thinks for the second time—and her daughter too. In the end the poet goes off very nobly and leaves mother and daughter to console one another.

We have come to *The Profligate*. *The Profligate* was a play about " the union of a delicate-minded child with a coarse, gross-natured profligate." The profligate, bearing " the signs of a dissolute life in his face," marries the young girl. To the office of the solicitor who is the young girl's guardian happens to come another young girl seduced by the profligate in the country, directed here by the first young girl and her brother who happened to meet her in the train. In the second act the honeymoon of the first young girl and the profligate, " who has lost his dissipated look," is interrupted near Florence by the arrival of the seduced young girl, who has happened to enter the service of people who happen to be friends of the first young girl.

In the third act comes the scene of confrontation. In the fourth act, a year later, the seduced young girl looks at the face for the last time of the first young girl's brother (who has come to love her) and vanishes to Australia for ever, while the profligate returns home to the first young girl and (*a*) takes poison, (*b*) lives happily ever after. The first ending was the one preferred by Sir Arthur Pinero, but the second ending was given in the theatre and approved by Mr. Clement Scott and Mr. Archer as the "only logical conclusion." *The Profligate* made a great sensation.

Lady Bountiful was a play about a young heiress in the country who loved a young gentleman who came to town and married the daughter of a riding-master. When business became bad with the riding-school he lived with his wife and her parents in the basement of a tenement house. Shortly after the young heiress has paid them a visit, the young wife dies in her chair before our eyes while her husband is talking to the baby in the cradle about the future. In the fourth act the young heiress is about to be married to an old gentleman, when who should stroll into the church but the young widower, in whose favour the old gentleman magnanimously retires.

The Second Mrs. Tanqueray was a play about a widower who knowingly marries a lady who has been the property of several men before, and takes her to live in the country. When his daughter

by his first marriage falls in love with a young man, the young man proves to have been one of her stepmother's protectors. The second Mrs. Tanqueray remarks that the world is very small, and goes upstairs and commits suicide. The suicide is reported to us by the daughter. " The limitations of *Mrs. Tanqueray* are really the limitations of the dramatic form," wrote Mr. William Archer.

The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith was a play about a lady who held " regrettable opinions " on some points, and who, before she fell in with a rising young politician, had gone so far in propagating them as to become alternatively known as Mad Agnes. Since she fears that she may find herself loving the young politician in the " helpless, common way of women," they live together without the ceremony of marriage, until the young politician's uncle the Duke comes to Venice and brings with him the young politician's wife. Mrs. Ebbsmith, after putting a Bible into the fire to show her contempt for conventional morality, burns her hand in taking it out again, and retires from the contest to learn to pray for the young politician and for the young politician's legal wife whom she has wronged.

The Benefit of the Doubt was a play about an innocent young woman who, since the Divorce Court has given her but the " benefit of the doubt," must positively " sit tight " in town in order to win back her good name; but her husband

proposes to take her abroad. Whereupon she goes straight off to the other man. His jealous wife, whose petition it is that has been dismissed, is put into the next room, while he goes through the ordeal of receiving the innocent young woman in such a manner as will establish their innocence in his wife's hearing. They survive the ordeal; the innocent young woman's family turns up, including a bishop; and we are left happy in the knowledge that now the innocent young woman's good name will be all right.

The Princess and the Butterfly was a play about a princess, no longer quite young, and her admirer the butterfly, the man of forty; and the play sets out in five acts of London and Parisian drawing-rooms how the Princess and the butterfly did not marry one another, but each married with youth.

The Gay Lord Quex was a play about another profligate, who means, like the other one, to turn over a new leaf; but in the course of doing so, he is unwise enough to pay a farewell visit to a Duchess in her bedroom at midnight. This gives a young woman who owns a manicure shop in Bond Street, but who is spending the night in the same house, the opportunity of doing a little detective work in the interests of the young lady the gay lord is to marry, who happens to be her foster-sister. In the course of this detective work the gay lord and the manicurist get shut up in the

bedroom together ; and our feelings are tremendously worked upon by the duel which ensues. Whose reputation is to go spotless out at that door—the gay lord's or the manicurist's ? Honours are easy : the gay lord is allowed to turn over his new leaf, and the manicurist is suffered to make happy her fiancé the palmist (who also happens to be sleeping in the same house).

Iris was a play about a young woman who has neither the recklessness nor the power of self-denial necessary to choose between the young lover who is poor and the middle-aged Jewish lover who is rich ; so she keeps them both on. She drifts, and she deteriorates, until she loses both men. We leave her Jewish lover smashing the furniture, as her own life is smashed.

Letty was a play about a young woman of the lower middle class who might have married her employer or accepted the protection of a well-disposed young man-about-town ; but in an epilogue we learn how much wiser she was to become the wife of a photographer.

The Thunderbolt, the thirty-fourth play of Sir Arthur Pinero, and successor to *His House in Order*, was a play about a will. The absence of the will makes the members of a provincial family wealthy ; the sudden confession of one of their number that she destroyed the will makes quite a different person wealthy. The wife's guilt is taken on himself by the husband, and a most charitable

part is played by the young person who is the injured beneficiary.

Mid-Channel was a play about a woman of the newly wealthy middle class who, because life is allowed to contain no worthy purpose for her, is driven out of life, while her husband is driven into drink. The careless lover and the careless husband, having finished their talk about her in the next room, open the door and find she has thrown herself over the balcony.

The "Mind the Paint" Girl was a play about a young lady of the musical drama and her circle. She was not only beautiful but good, and when she felt badly about leaving her humbler admirer for the son of an earl, she was exhorted to remember 'wot a lot o' good' she was doing to the aristocracy.

That is the serious drama of Sir Arthur Pinero. Since it is what we have to talk about, and its bulk is large, we shall be none the worse for having it before us. Supposing it to have limitations, for the moment, are the limitations of this drama "the limitations of the dramatic form"? If the critic was right about *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* this book may end where it begins, with the drama of Sir Arthur Pinero.

There is the drama which is an art, and there is the drama also which is a trade. The distinction is an important one, but not one that is always clearly made; that is the reason why we shall do well to make it here, before we go further. If a

man is moved to put his vision of life, or of something in life, into a play, he will want a theatre for it, because except in the theatre he cannot look upon his play, and see whether it is good; and when a play, conceived after this fashion, comes to the theatre, it is likely, given the necessary qualities in the dramatist, to be art. But the theatre is always with us; in a city where a great many people live, there are a great many theatres. These theatres must be kept open. For economic reasons, which need not be gone into here, they must be kept open. For social reasons, too, they must be kept open; for a man must have somewhere to go when he is tired with his day's work, and without the theatres what would there be to do between dinner and supper? The social reason for the theatres is that they pass the time; and why should they not? It is an excellent function. But a minority of people are not content to pass the time unless they pass it in some highly approved fashion. Nothing is more highly approved, as a pastime, than Art. Now there is one art that is thoroughly efficient as a pastime, and at the same time so amusing that you would never know it was an art at all. This is the theatre. And the theatre, if it is not content to be frankly a place where time is passed, must have a drama in order to keep open.

Besides, every really cultured country has a Drama. What would there be for the critics to do if they could not ask themselves from time to time,

Is the Drama Advancing ? That is the reason why the theatres of commerce are not all jolly places like the Tivoli and the Gaiety. Art, where the people have "got culture," is good business. So it happens that every great country has a number of theatres devoted to the Drama. The plays that come to the theatre in order to keep it open may perfectly well be art ; but it is more likely that they will not be. It will now be clear that a "dramatist" is not so absolute a thing as we perhaps thought him. People, between dinner and supper, like to have a little acting. They like their pleasures to take an approved form, and so a play is provided ; this has the advantage also of giving them a story to talk about afterwards, when they have done with the merits and the demerits of the actors. The actors like to have a play provided also, since they have ceased to be vagabonds and have become aware of the exceptional dignity of their profession. The dramatist is merely the man with the trick of providing these plays. It will be a mistake to think of the dramatist as the artist whose vision of life is so clear and compelling as to take inevitably the form we characterize as dramatic. So long as there are theatres there must be "dramatists," vision or no vision. The men who prove their ability in any generation to keep the theatres open will be the great dramatists of that generation.

But when they have proved their ability to weave a story round the favourite actors, they will,

artists or not artists, evolve a kind of pride. They will like to do their work well; they will evolve the tradition of the "well-made" play. The well-made play is orderly, efficient, and economical; it is thoroughly fitted to keep the theatres open. The actors will be content with the well-made play, because it will carry them along, and because its "great scene" will invest them with greatness. The public will be content, because they like to see their favourite actors involved in important situations. The critics will be content, because they can compare one well-made play with another play not so well made, one actor with another actor; and have they not always their "instinctive, unreasoning, unreasonable love for the theatre, simply *as* the theatre," to fall back upon? It will be a pleasure to the dramatist to go on conquering unnecessary conventions, and so to give further contentment to the critics by proof that the drama is advancing. The theatre of commerce, happy in the well-made play, appears such a contented little institution that it is almost an inconsiderate act for the artist to break into it. Without him those concerned can so well keep their house in order.

The artist, moreover, will not find it easy to break in. The dramatists who have proved their ability to keep the theatres open do not want him. The managers do not want him so long as they are able to keep their theatres open. So long as they

are willing to keep the managers' theatres open the public give proof that they do not want him. An official of the Royal Household, by whose permission the theatres are opened at all in England, most certainly does not want him. But of all these, the most successful in keeping him out are the practising dramatists. As we have seen, they are very proud of their profession. Having proved their own ability to keep the theatres open, they take their stand upon the statement that it is very difficult to be a dramatist. Drama, they say, is not merely the greatest, it is the most difficult of the arts. They point to the failure of the poet or novelist when he comes to the theatre, and their gesture implies that these lesser, or at least different, artists are very well in their place. But they lack the dramatic talent. "There is only one exception to the rule," Sir Arthur Pinero has said, "that during the nineteenth century no poet or novelist of the slightest eminence made any success upon the stage, and even that solitary exception is a dubious one. I refer, as you may surmise, to Bulwer Lytton. There is no doubt as to his success; but what does the twentieth century think of his eminence?" Let us see how Sir Arthur Pinero goes on to define the dramatic talent, by which alone the theatre of commerce may be satisfactorily kept open.

"What is dramatic talent?" he has asked.[1] "Is

[1] Lecture on "R. L. Stevenson: the Dramatist."

it not the power to project characters, and to cause them to tell an interesting story through the medium of dialogue? This is *dramatic* talent; and dramatic talent, if I may so express it, is the raw material of *theatrical* talent. Dramatic, like poetic, talent is born, not made; if it is to achieve success on the stage, it must be developed into theatrical talent by hard study, and generally by long practice. For theatrical talent consists in the power of making your characters not only tell a story by means of dialogue, but tell it in such skilfully devised form and order as shall, within the limits of an ordinary theatrical representation, give rise to the greatest possible amount of that peculiar kind of emotional effect the production of which is the one great function of the theatre."

The production of this peculiar kind of emotional effect is the business, then, of the well-made play. It requires a great deal of theatrical talent, make no mistake about that. The well-made play is not merely some kind of a story woven about favourite actors; it is a story woven so skilfully that it fits them as beautifully as do their own clothes. It is a story carefully devised to contain every situation which the public is known to love to see its actors in, told, for preference, in the language of the newspapers they have just been reading. It is a kind of calculation of the chances of wringing from the public theatrical emotion. Above all, for the production of its peculiar kind of emotional

effect, it depends upon the " great scene," to which all else in the play may be regarded as leading up.

It is to be observed that each of the serious plays of Sir Arthur Pinero may be spoken of by reference to a single scene, without risk of misunderstanding. Thus we have the Bible-burning play, the play with the listening scene, the furniture-smashing play, the play about a bedroom, and so on ; and when we name the plays by this method, we are not conscious of having left the essential thing out, as we should be, for example, if we spoke of " Hamlet " as the play with the listening scene, or of " Othello " as the play about a bedroom. *The Gay Lord Quex* is, quite simply, a play about a bedroom. It takes us two acts to get into the bedroom, and it takes us another act to get out again ; but what possible doubt is there that the bedroom, and not the play, is the thing ? Let us suppose the play to have been conceived somewhat after this fashion. First, take a bedroom ; put into it a midnight assignation ; throw in a third person ; and stir thoroughly. Now it will not do to be misled by the cookery-book manner into thinking that we may take " any bedroom " : we are making a play, and not a pudding, and theatrical talent is only to be achieved by hard study, and generally by long practice. This bedroom must have at least two doors, and a boudoir will be desirable ; it is by these things that we know the dramatic craftsman. Given the bedroom, whom are we to put into

it ? Obviously a profligate to whom detection is dangerous, a guilty woman to whom detection is dangerous, and an innocent woman to whom detection is dangerous. Why should detection be dangerous to a professional profligate ? Let us make him an elderly profligate who is turning over a new leaf, and, before becoming the husband of a charming young girl, is saying good-bye to the Duchess—yes, a Duchess, because obviously the virtue of a Duchess is the highest possible in the scale of importance. Since the third person is to be guilty of spying, plainly she must be of the lower order ; but if she is of the lower order, what reason can there be for setting so much value on her virtue ? She must be sympathetic ; she must be taking this risk in order to shield some one very dear to her from marriage with an elderly profligate ; we will make her the young lady's foster-sister, and we will add to the sense of the risk she is taking by arranging that her own fiancé shall be sleeping in the same house. Now, at last, the scene should be secure of its emotional effect. Move one, discovery of the young person watching at first door. Move two, exit of the Duchess by second door, and summons for the young person. Move three, the profligate, alone with the young person in the bedroom, offers her two, four, five thousand pounds as the price of her silence. Move four, the profligate appeals to the young person's pity. Move five, the profligate turns the tables

on the young person : he has the key, and if they are found together, what is discovery for him, a profligate, compared with discovery for her, an innocent young person with a fiancé at the other end of the corridor ? Move six, desperation of the young person, and imminent triumph of the profligate. Move seven, heroic resolve of the young person to sacrifice her honour rather than the happiness of her foster-sister ; she tugs at the bell-rope. Move eight, gentlemanly resolve of the profligate—who is really quite a good fellow at heart—not to bring ruin upon the young person. Move nine, the household knocking at the door—shall she tell ? Move ten, let generosity meet generosity ; the household be sent back to its bed ; the young person, turning to the profligate, say, " Oh, God bless you ! You—you—you're a gentleman ! I'll do what I can for you ! " and Curtain.

Now our business here may fairly be with the hand of Sir Arthur Pinero, but it can hardly be with the mind of Sir Arthur Pinero ; and we can do no more than venture the suggestion that it was somewhat after this fashion that *The Gay Lord Quex* came into being. *The Gay Lord Quex* was a play carefully planned by an expert craftsman in such a manner as, within the limits of an ordinary theatrical representation, to give rise to the greatest possible amount of that peculiar kind of emotional effect, the production of which is, we are told, the one great function of the theatre. The

scene in the bedroom went off successfully, and we called it a good play. Now let us turn to another play which was, in its own day, equally successful ; the play which was laid out with earnestness, and with the assistance of poetry upon the programme, around the thesis that no profligate can ever be reformed. I suppose the great scene of *The Profligate* was the scene of confrontation in the third act. By a device of the dramatist, the young wife is made to believe that a profligate peer, and not her husband, is The Profligate. "This poor child is a living sacrifice to a man whose history is a horrible chapter of dishonour," she says, and the next moment, in her presence, the living sacrifice is brought face to face with the man whose history is a horrible chapter—her own husband of a month ! "Girl, do you mean that you know *Mr. Renshaw* ? " This is the scene for which we have sat and waited ; now that it is over, do we care very much whether the fourth act shows us a profligate poisoned in his wife's forgiving arms, or a profligate—despite the poetry on the programme—happy for ever after ? It is for the critics of the period to answer ; but one fancies not. We shall have had our money's worth in theatrical emotion whichever way the story ends.

We should most of us say that *The Gay Lord Quex* is a better play than *The Profligate* ; but it will not do to say that, and have done. If the later

play about a profligate gives evidence of a more highly developed theatrical talent than did the earlier play about a profligate, the difference has already led us into a discussion of technique. There are, Sir Arthur Pinero has said, in speaking of some of his predecessors in the theatre,[1] " two parts of technique, which I may perhaps call its strategy and its tactics. In strategy—in the general laying out of a play, those transpontine dramatists were often, as I have said, more than tolerably skilful ; but in tactics, in the art of getting their characters on and off the stage, of conveying information to the audience, and so forth, they were almost incredibly careless and conventional." It has been the achievement, then, of Sir Arthur Pinero to have improved the strategy and tactics of English play-writing, and especially the tactics. Upon the production of " The Lights o' London " Mr. William Archer, " in common with many other critics, conceived great hopes of Mr. Sims." But it was not Mr. Sims's destiny to carry on the strategy and the tactics of the English well-made play to a still higher point of development. It was Sir Arthur Pinero's, and not Mr. Sims's, to satisfy Mr. Archer's hopes with a *Mrs. Tanqueray,* and, eventually, more than to satisfy them with a *His House in Order.*

The dramatist of the well-made play starts, we have seen, with a situation which will be " effective "

[1] In " R. L. Stevenson : the Dramatist."

in the theatre—the bedroom, the Bible-burning, the furniture-smashing. The ability to conceive these ideas from which theatrical emotion may be wrung is a definite indication of theatrical talent. Having conceived one of these ideas, the dramatist proceeds to "lay it out"—to tell an interesting story through the medium of dialogue. Since Sir Arthur Pinero's metaphor is military, we may say that *The Gay Lord Quex* is an interesting story laid out like a train of gunpowder to explode in a bedroom. Similarly *The Benefit of the Doubt* is a play written because it makes possible the scene in the third act, at which we may look on in an agony of apprehension lest the innocent young woman betray herself by a false step into the hands of the listening wife—we should hardly suspect the play of having been written for the sake of anything else that is in it. There are earlier crises in *Mrs. Ebbsmith*; that one, for example, at the end of the second act, when the lady, by entering handsomely gowned and with the fashion of her hair altered, makes it clear to the Duke and to us that she is going to put up a fight; but it is by the third act and the Bible-burning that the play in the theatre must stand or fall. *Mrs. Tanqueray* is deceptive; the play might so easily have been a tragedy of incompatible characters. The mad marriage might have been made to work its own ruin; it is sufficient to point out that it did not, but is dependent upon the "great scene" of the wife confronted by her

earlier protector in the person of the suitor for her stepdaughter's hand for its principal demand on our emotions. *His House in Order,* in the manner of its laying out, is a type perfect of the well-made play. The letters are written, the letters are concealed, their recipient is removed from this world ; all this is cast back into the past. In the play, the letters are brought from their hiding-place and are delivered into the hands of the new wife under circumstances which give rise to the greatest possible amount of that peculiar kind of emotional effect the production of which is the play's one great function. Only we need no longer believe it was the hand of God that delivered them, any more than we really believe that the hand that sent Mrs. Tanqueray upstairs to her room to destroy herself was the hand that made the world so inconveniently small.

The dramatist's " strategy " lays out a play so effectively as sometimes to leave it quite dead, and the dramatist's " tactics " are often such, it must be admitted, as to do nothing to bring it to life again.

Now tactics, we saw, had three main parts : (*a*) the art of getting characters on to the stage, (*b*) of conveying information when they are there, and (*c*) of getting them off again. In *The Profligate,* the first of Sir Arthur Pinero's plays to be regarded as a masterpiece, it is desirable that the seduced young person should be got on to the stage. She

is brought along, quite simply, by the young girl who is about to be married to her seducer, they having happened to become acquainted with one another in the railway train. Once on the stage, it is desirable that she should convey to the audience the information that Mr. Dunstan Renshaw is her seducer. A sympathetic young solicitor, partner to the elderly solicitor who is giving his ward to the profligate, and sympathetically in love with her himself, will be useful. Then this is how it is done :

HUGH MURRAY [*to himself*]. Great Heavens ! If by any awful freak of fate this poor creature is a victim of Renshaw's —and *she* at this moment standing beside him—— ! What a fool I am to think of no man but Renshaw !

JANET PREECE. Don't ask me to describe him in words, sir,—I can't, I can't. But I've taught myself to draw his face faithfully. I'm not boasting—I can't draw anything else because I see nothing else. Give me some paper I can sketch upon, and a pencil.

[HUGH *hands her paper and pencil, and watches while she sketches.*]

HUGH MURRAY [*to himself*]. If the face she sketches should bear any resemblance to his, what could I do, what could I do ?

JANET PREECE [*to herself*]. That's with his mocking look as I last saw him. He is always mocking me now.

HUGH MURRAY [*to himself*]. I could do nothing—it's too late—nothing. Shall I look now ? No. What a coward I am ! Yes. [*He looks over* JANET'S *shoulder.*] Renshaw ! [*He struggles against his agitation.*] The wife ! I must think of the wife. . . .

Impossible to deny that this gives us the informa-

tion. We may have doubts about this seduced young person who, unable to draw anything else, can sit down and draw her seducer, "with his mocking look," so well as to obtain instant recognition. If we put ourselves into her place, and into her period, we may think it more probable that we should have produced something with an equal likeness to Mr. Chamberlain and Mr. Gladstone. But that we should put ourselves in the place of people on the stage would not have seemed a fair test to the English dramatists of *The Profligate's* year; and it was a test that did not occur to the critics whose business it was to conceive great hopes, and to answer, at all costs in the affirmative, the solemn question, Is Our Drama Advancing? The scene in question gave them the information; and, when they had done admiring the way in which the dramatist got his seduced young person on to the stage, they could go on to admire the way in which he got her off again, by dismissing her sympathetically to Australia. And this is the ending to the play about the wife who dies in her chair, leaving her husband free to go back to the woman who always loved him. The latter is taking a look at the village church, preparatory to wedding another (Richard):

CAMILLA. How *could* I have forgotten it? To have hoarded it for five years and then, in one minute of forgetfulness, to let it go from me! [*She sits by the font.*] It was a trust. "If he wanders back to England some day without

me," poor Margaret said, " give it to him, with your own hands." And now, if ever he returns—if—ever— Oh, I mustn't think about that! No! God bless me and Richard! God bless me and Richard!

[DENNIS *ascends the steps. He passes* CAMILLA, *not seeing her, and walks across towards the porch. She rises with a faint cry of fright, at which he turns sharply and faces her. They stand staring at each other silently.*]

CAMILLA [*in a frightened whisper*]. Dennis!

DENNIS. Ah! [*Going to her with outstretched hands.*] Camilla!

To end is a simple business, with Richard proving suitably magnanimous. At times we are tempted to forget what the dramatists of the well-made play so persistently have told us, that theirs is the most difficult of the arts.

And now it is time to state quite clearly a fact which must have been sufficiently obvious already. The hand of Sir Arthur Pinero has gone on gaining in cunning. It is only because Sir Arthur Pinero is a clever man who has advanced with his times that we were able to say that the history of his plays is the history of thirty years of the English theatre. Considered both strategically and tactically, we have seen that *The Gay Lord Quex* is a better made play than *The Profligate*—the ten years that separated them were ten years well spent. *The Princess and the Butterfly* does not come so simply by its expected end as *Lady Bountiful* did. While *Mrs. Tanqueray* and *Iris* and *Mid-Channel* are all in theme not dissimilar, *Iris* is a

better made play than *Mrs. Tanqueray* and *Mid-Channel* is a better made play than *Iris.* To the last Sir Arthur Pinero is willing to learn, is ready to conquer an unnecessary convention ; it is the most sterling of his sterling qualities In *Mrs. Tanqueray* the comic relief afforded by Sir George and Lady Orreyd is an unnecessary convention, which is conquered in *Iris*; in *Iris* the lowering of the curtain upon nine occasions is an interference with the direct telling of an interesting story, which is overcome in *Mid-Channel.* The " great scene " of the discovery of the will in *The Thunderbolt* is an even more skilful piece of work than the " great scene " of the discovery of the letters in *His House in Order.* And with certainty we may say that in the first fifteen years of this dramatist's professional practice there is nothing to foreshadow the mastery of stage means that is shown in the single incident of the latchkey of Maldonado. The latchkey, symbol of Iris's freedom from molestation, is dropped into the vase on the mantelpiece " with a sharp sound " ; the sound is the guarantee that we shall remember it lying there ; when Maldonado quietly withdraws it, the action speaks to us of all that he knows, of the certainty that Iris will later that evening meet with her fate. This is the famous " sense of the theatre " ; it is something that is altogether apart from the ability to express oneself freely in the English language, and it is something the possession of which is by

no means to be under-estimated. But just as it has been possible to say something which has a general truth about the strategy of the plays, so is it possible to say something which has a general truth about their tactics. It is possible to point, for example, to the "soliloquy" and the "aside." Essentially, in its use of such things, the technique of Pinero is the technique of Robertson and the technique of the Restoration; and they are, it may be noted, as integral a part of *Letty* or *The "Mind the Paint" Girl* as they were of *Dandy Dick* or *Sweet Lavender.* The people of Sir Arthur Pinero have a little scale of factitious inaudibility up and down which they run: *Thinking, To himself, Half to himself, To herself in a whisper, To herself in a low voice, In an undertone, Under her breath as he passes her, In her ear,* and so on. These little licences are, as may be imagined, a great convenience to the working dramatist. And need it be said that when a person in a play by Sir Arthur Pinero is in receipt of a letter, the spirit of humours answers the prayer of Maria in the comedy and intimates reading aloud to him?

It is possible to say, for another example, and I do not think that we shall be contradicted, that there is sometimes a lack of intimacy between the people "brought on" and "taken off" in fulfilment of this dramatist's purposes, and in the manner in which they "convey their information." Sir Arthur Pinero's dramatic diction is

something quite constant. We are surprised, in view of the intimate relationship existing between them and the fact that he arrives through the window, that Sophy's fiancé should say, "I love you! Ever since I had the honour of being presented to you by Mr. Salmon, the picture-dealer next door, I have thought of you, dreamt of you, constantly." Since Mr. Salmon played so important a part, it cannot be that Sophy should have forgotten that he is a picture-dealer and lives next door; is it possible that it is to us, and not to Sophy, that the information is being conveyed? Is it possible, in the following, that Iris is telling us and not her young lover that his uncle is an Archdeacon named Standish?

LAURENCE. You remember that when, six weeks ago, I wrote to my uncle, telling him I was hanging up for a while the idea of leaving England, he sent me, generously enough, his good wishes and a cheque for five hundred pounds?

IRIS. Yes.

LAURENCE. At the same time his letter conveyed a very decided intimation that I was neither to see him nor hear from him again.

IRIS. I read Archdeacon Standish's note.

But it is not only when burdened by a consciousness of the information they have to convey that this dramatist's people find intimacy impossible. Two girls of twenty are having a cosy chat together; says one of them: "Leslie, I perceive I have done Mr. Renshaw an injustice. But surely you had some

further motive in sharing with me the privilege of enjoying Mr. Renshaw's estimate of the gentleman who is to be my husband ? " A young gentleman excuses himself from a birthday party at which some shop-girls are honouring him : " I am going to behave very rudely, I fear. A rather pressing matter has arisen which necessitates my leaving you for a few minutes. I throw myself on your mercy." And then we have this from the mature Pinero of *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith :*

LUCAS [*going up to her eagerly*]. What do you think of my essay ?

AGNES. It bristles with truth ; it is vital.

LUCAS. My method of treating it ?

AGNES. Hardly a word out of place.

LUCAS [*chilled*]. *Hardly* a word ?

AGNES. Not a word, in fact.

LUCAS. No, dear, I dare say your " hardly " is nearer the mark.

AGNES. I assure you it is brilliant, Lucas.

It must be understood that Mrs. Ebbsmith and her young politician are living together on terms of the greatest intimacy ; it must be understood, I say, because the fact is hardly to be gathered from the style of her literary criticism nor from the manner in which he receives it. The notorious lady who nearly burned the Bible at one moment relapses into a speech in the Hyde Park manner which earned for her her earlier notoriety ; considering that her audience is the cynical roué the Duke of St. Olpherts, who is trying to part her from

his nephew, the moment is not well chosen; but it is her incidental lapses into rhetoric that are far more unfortunate, supposing it to be of any importance that we regard her as a real person.

All Sir Arthur Pinero's persons are unfortunate in this respect. If they like the view, they say, "I could gaze at this prospect for ever." They say, "Have done! Have done!" when they wish to convey that that is enough, and "Pray complete your sentence," when they mean "go on." If they wish to say you are right, they say "It affords me great pleasure to subscribe to that," and if they wish to say you are wrong, they say, "You are mistaken in the construction you put upon it." "Be silent," they say, and "Please to ring the bell," and, if they are very strongly moved, "Let me be rid of you!" This strange kind of speech is held entirely in common. There is the pleasant young girl in the early play (on no account to be mistaken for a comic character) who announces that "There are certain prescribed limits beyond which it is not decorous for a young person to step during the period of engagement. I feel you are travelling beyond those limits." There is the sympathetic curate in *The Hobby Horse* who remarks, "Let me be rid of you! Your money has mildewed the bread with which I feed the dear ones who are dependent upon me, long enough!" There is the pleasant young girl whom Quex is to marry, whose opinion of the word "To-night!"

which Sophy overheard in the garden takes the form of "A hundred topics of conversation would lead to such an expression. You are mistaken in the construction you put upon it. The Duchess of Strood is a most immaculate woman." This disturbing peculiarity of Sir Arthur Pinero's people becomes positively startling when they speak in some such terms of themselves. The brother to the young lady who marries the profligate announces the intention of himself and his sister to remain "simple, light-hearted boy and girl for ever and ever." The young woman who is given the benefit of the doubt is of the opinion (with particular regard to herself) that "Ninety-nine women out of a hundred are kept fresh and sweet by nothing better than mere sentiment." How poignant the cry of Paula Tanqueray is intended to be, "I've always been a good woman!" "I, the virtuous, unsoiled woman!" says the lady who supplies the Bible to Mrs. Ebbsmith; "Yes, I am a virtuous woman. . . ." Even the young lady who found fame by exhorting us to mind the paint lives anxious days lest she should do anything "actually not nice." "Nobody can breathe a word against my respectability," is the proud boast of Miss Sophy Fullgarny. There were critics who held, when the straight young English girl in *Mid-Channel* said, "Oh, I don't want to boast, but I'm a straight, clean girl——," that the remark was out of her character. It will be nearer

the truth to say that this conscientious self-revelation on the part of Sir Arthur Pinero's people is the dramatist's way of making up for that congenital absence of intimacy of which we have spoken.

But it must not be supposed from the foregoing that Sir Arthur Pinero's people, when they convey information about themselves or about things in general, are content, in an expressive Americanism, to " deliver the goods." One of the ways we have of recognizing Sir Arthur Pinero's people is by their fondness for a kind of allegory. Says the stockbroker-raisonneur of *Mid-Channel,* who has himself devised the term for a phase in the relations of married people which makes the play's title, " You follow me ? You grasp the poetic allegory ? " Sir Arthur Pinero's people put a constant demand upon us to grasp the poetic allegory. Hugh Murray, for example, the sympathetic solicitor, strikes out on the subject of wild oats, with the profligate for auditor :

To-morrow, next week, next month, you may be happy—but what of the time when those wild oats thrust their ears through the very seams of the floor trodden by the wife whose respect you will have learned to covet ! You may drag her into the crowded streets—there is the same vile growth springing up from the chinks of the pavement ! In your house, or in the open, the scent of the mildewed grain always in your nostrils, and in your ears no music but the wind's rustle amongst the fat sheaves ! And, worst of all, your wife's heart a granary bursting with the load of shame your profligacy has stored there ! I warn you, etc.

Dick Phenyl, the sympathetic though drunken barrister, makes great play with the story of Cinderella at a crisis in the action, just as Hilary Jesson, British Minister to the Republic of Santa Guarda and raisonneur-in-ordinary to the household at Overbury Towers, makes great play with a story about a chef. Marriage, to Mrs. Ebbsmith, is "the choked-up, seething pit"; loss of reputation, to Cayley Drummle, "the social Dead Sea"; herself, to Mrs. Tanqueray, "a candle that gutters." Even Lord Quex, between his gallantries, has time to embroider a little on the theme of turning over a new leaf. Sir Arthur Pinero's use of poetic allegory is so much his own, and the British theatre's, that we need not look for influences. When Mrs. Ebbsmith says of her Lucas, "He is my child, my husband, my lover, my bread, my daylight—all—everything. Mine! Mine!" and to the cynical Duke of all people, well, we think of her unfortunate training in Hyde Park; but when we find her talking of her Hour, her Hour, we may remember that although her creator did not approve of "the small despairing message from the great voice of Henrik Ibsen," he would not be Sir Arthur Pinero if he had not been willing to catch some tones of the great voice.

In all Sir Arthur Pinero's people there is something we must call vulgarity for lack of a better word. His young women are "just a *leetle* rapid." Directly the news of poor pa's death came, "Ma

took off her corsets," in *The Benefit of the Doubt*; and she repeats the process at crises in the play's action. "Women—God bless 'em!" says Sir Arthur Pinero's ideal man, with a kind of imaginative slap on the back. "That nice gal," is the word of Sir Chichester Frayne or Mr. Peter Mottram for the creamy English girl, "beautiful pink and white right through." Miriam, Marchioness of Castlejordan, would like to have been the mother of a "complete boy"; as it is, her daughter the Amazon, carried upstairs by a young man, has to answer the question, "Think he guessed you—weren't the—usual sort of young man?" When the Duchess and Quex were together at Stockholm it will be remembered she entered nothing indiscreet in her diary—"only the words, 'warm evening.'" But to point to this quality in Sir Arthur Pinero's people is not for one moment to bring a charge of indelicacy against his drama. When a Duchess undresses, or a Princess gets out of bed of a morning, or a lady of musical comedy puts on her stockings, the dramatist always arranges that she shall be concealed by a screen or a table; while his people, even when moved by the conviction of infidelity to the point at which they break furniture, have no plainer word than "trull" in their vocabulary. When Mrs. Ebbsmith suggests to her lover that their union should be "devoid of passion," she averts her eyes. And is not the passage in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* quite perfectly delicate?

DRUMMLE. In Heaven's name, tell me what's happened ?
AUBREY [*gripping* DRUMMLE'S *arm*]. Paula ! Paula !
DRUMMLE. What ?
AUBREY. They met to-night here. They—they—they're not strangers to each other.

No, there is no possible case on which to sustain a charge of verbal indelicacy. But all Sir Arthur Pinero's people might live very happily in that up-river villa where the doll is affixed by a cord through the ceiling to the couch in the room above, and make jokes about "Rippingill *versus* Rippingill, Bowen, Fletcher, Hedderwick, and Rideout—there were no more." At least they would not find the atmosphere oppressive there.

Perhaps this is the place to record that it has been pointed out on Sir Arthur Pinero's behalf that the purpose of his comic drama is to satirize vulgar people. "It is well known," says his critic,[1] "that Mr. Pinero holds decided views of his own as to the nature and function of farce ; indeed he claims for it a wider scope and more comprehensive purpose than have ever been associated with farce of the old Adelphi type, or the more modern genus of the Palais Royal. He has openly expressed his opinion that farce must gradually become the modern equivalent of comedy, since the present being an age of sentiment rather than of manners, the comic playwright must of necessity seek his humour in the exaggeration of

[1] Mr. Malcolm C. Salaman, introduction to *The Times*.

sentiment. Thus Mr. Pinero holds that farce should treat of probable people placed in possible circumstances, but regarded from a point of view which exaggerates their sentiments and magnifies their foibles. In this light it is permitted to this class of play, not only to deal with ridiculous incongruities of incident and character, but to satirize society, and to wring laughter from those possible distresses of life which might trace their origin to fallacies of feeling and extravagancies of motive."

Certainly Sir Arthur Pinero has achieved humour, intentional or unintentional, in the exaggeration of sentiment. Certainly he has used his theatrical talent to wring laughter from vulgar people in his comic drama, as he has used it to wring theatrical emotion from them in his serious. A gentleman who says, "Miaou! miaou! puss, puss, puss!" when he is offered a sausage-roll, is, it is only kind to suppose, a vulgar person satirized. But his best play does not satirize vulgar people; it tries to understand them. At this stage in our proceedings, it will be almost necessary to provide a separate category for *Mid-Channel*. The dramatist knows the Blundells, and, as a consequence, we feel we know them too. Zoe had a "hell of a row last night"; and she drifts from a hell of a row to a hell of a mess. She takes us with her, as she "goes her mucker." Admiration may be pointed to the skill with which the true motivity to the

tragedy, childlessness, is deferred in its revelation to nearly the end of the third act—"I want you to remember that bargain, in judging me; and I want you to tell Peter of it." It may be pointed to the skill in dramatic preparation shown in the masterly fourth act, "Mother, do come and look at the tiny men and women"—from the balcony, that is, from which Zoe is to throw herself down. This is a fruit of that hard study and long practice of which we found the dramatist speaking; it is a touch from the same hand that tinkled audibly Maldonado's latchkey. In this act we may see theatrical talent subserving dramatic imagination; can it be that that is the truer relation than the one we heard Sir Arthur Pinero enounce? Certain it is that *Mid-Channel* is the best of Sir Arthur Pinero's plays. We may still have doubts about the husband who goes straight off to drink and an impossible woman the moment his wife leaves him; we may have doubts about the straight, clean girl—aged twenty-six—who "oughtn't to know about such things"; but we do not wish to doubt Zoe or the manner of her "mucker." *Mid-Channel,* we would say, is the play Sir Arthur Pinero wrote because he wanted to write it, rather than because the theatre was of opinion that a new play was due; and when he had written it, it failed, under an ironic fate, to keep its theatre open.

Nor must this last of the major plays be left

until we have noted in it a kind of technical self-consciousness which is important in illuminating much that has gone before. "Times have changed, master," says Scaramel to Pierrot in the third act of the fantasy. Through this play also there runs a vein of knowledge that the times have changed. "There's too much of this trying to say something fresh on every subject," says Peter Mottram; it is—may we fancy?—his master's voice. When marriage is compared to a pair of horses that stop prancing and settle down to a trot—a piece of poetic allegory that would have passed without apology in *Mrs. Tanqueray*—here in *Mid-Channel* it must be taken care of as "a worm-eaten illustration." Even the "tactics," war-proven in how many campaigns, are not immune from self-criticism. "You *are* full of information, mother," is the protective reproof incurred by Mrs. Pierpoint when, to give her justice, she is doing no more in the matter of first-act usefulness than had been done, far more flagrantly, by her predecessors for a quarter of a century. The consciousness that times change, and with them things dramatic, is as much a part of *Mid-Channel* as it is of *Trelawney of the "Wells"*; whose Tom Wrench, it will be remembered, was a loyal portrait of Robertson the master.

In a drama which, in the main, by keeping character subservient to action, has satisfied, at least in the letter, the precept of Aristotle, the

true and pathetic figure of Zoe Blundell stands rather alone. For the rest, the dramatis personæ drilled and marshalled beneath the hand of Sir Arthur Pinero, whether for purposes of serious or of comic demonstration, are amenable enough types—"probable people placed in possible circumstances." We may, if we like, give it as our opinion that the Mortimores are placed in more probable circumstances than the Ridgeleys, that the persons who revolve about Letty, or the girl who sang about the paint, are either more or less possible than the persons of *Girls and Boys* or *The Times*; but, Ridgeleys or Mortimores, photographers or palmists or dukes or dilettanti of the musical "drama," Mrs. Tanqueray or Mrs. Ebbsmith or Iris Bellamy or Sophy Fullgarney or Renshaw or Maldonado or Quex, Sir Arthur Pinero's people have not forgotten the days through which they were obedient figures in a practical dramatist's toy theatre for the invention of well-made plays. Character, in the Pinero theatre, being a matter that is remembered only after strategy and tactics have had their due, does but rarely surprise us; be it a hairdresser, his talk is of "the untidiest chin in the Inner Temple"; a Frenchman, "Necessity is the mother of objecting to a smoking carriage"; an agricultural labourer, "I be a poor agricultural labourer"; a young wife, "I think, sir—whatever Clement thinks, always"; a straight clean young

English girl, let her say so, and have done. It may be summarized as the organization of the expected. Most useful of all in the familiar regiment of persons is the raisonneur, the family's disinterested visitor, the practical dramatist's friend; the man without whom no well-made play is complete, for may not information at all hours of the day and night be conveyed to him, and through him to us? His name is, in successive reincarnations, Hugh Murray, Cayley Drummle, Croker Harrington, Hilary Jesson, Peter Mottram; but, whatever his name, his character is not greatly different from that given to Hilary, "a type of the genial, perennially fresh cosmopolitan." He it is who, having expended himself in disinterested labours, murmurs, "My dear old pals!" and, before he withdraws, stands for a moment looking lingeringly at those he has happily reconciled. He it is—sitting, perhaps, late at night over the fire with a woman, between him and whom there is "never one single thought of anything but friendship on either side"—who voices the practical, comforting message from one person of the world to another that is Sir Arthur Pinero's: "Don't fret; it'll be all the same a hundred years hence," or something of that kind. It is a little message in a great voice. Sir Arthur Pinero set some words on the title-page of an early play: "I don't aspire to great things, but I wish to speak of great things with gratitude and of mean things with indignation." His

people's world is St. James's, "our little parish of St. James's," as the good Cayley has it; their concern is that by Goodwood week the reputation of some one who has been foolish, perhaps, but not guilty, shall be sound as any woman's in England; and their creator has little patience with the "parochial pessimism" of the Ibsen drama. "We poor modern playwrights," says he, "will not be found wanting at least in the endeavour to respond to lofty and heroic inspiration."

And yet it is not so much for lofty and heroic inspiration that the Pinero drama is notable, as for the complete efficiency with which it has discharged its various yet unvarying purpose. We have seen this drama take its rise in the drama with a rural setting, and in the drama of "girls" and "boys." When the theatre wanted sweet lavender, an ample supply was conceded; when "Ghosts" and "Hedda Gabler" were heard of, it was Sir Arthur Pinero who gave the theatre a profligate and a Paula Tanqueray; when England was in need of a Drama with which to front Europe, it was Sir Arthur Pinero who was found to have supplied it. This cumulative ability to give of the best that he knew is the essence of the achievement of Sir Arthur Pinero. Even in the comic plays that small boy in the early farce who set fire to the house with a firework only reaches his true apotheosis in the third act of

Mr. Panmure; there is no scene in the Court Theatre farces which goes off with this stately precision of the set-piece. Perhaps it would not have been possible for Sir Arthur Pinero to have achieved the first act of *The Thunderbolt* if the third act of "The Voysey Inheritance" had not shown him the way. Certainly it would not have been possible for Sir Arthur Pinero to make *The Profligate* that determined essay in conjugal unhappiness he himself achieved in *Mid-Channel.* In the drama of Sir Arthur Pinero we may find in actual epitome the answers to a generation of anxious questionings, Is the Drama Advancing? No other hand could project characters so well fitted to the favourite actors of his generation, or cause them to tell so interesting a story through the medium of dialogue. No other hand could devise such skilful form and order as, within the limits of an ordinary theatrical representation, to give rise to so great an amount of that peculiar kind of emotional effect, the production of which was the one great function of his theatre. No other hand, in fact, could supply so efficiently the actual demand. When, in the fullness of time and honours, Sir Arthur Pinero has need of an epitaph, it may well be this: He kept the theatres open.

II

HENRY ARTHUR JONES

THE English drama of his day, said Matthew Arnold, lay between the heavens and the earth; it was neither realistic nor idealistic, but just "fantastic." He could not have put it more kindly.

Sir Arthur Pinero once disclaimed "any absolute and inherent superiority for our modern realistic technique"; but in making this disclaimer on behalf of his own plays he did not use terms in the sense in which they will be used in this book. Even so, he set up a banner under which Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, for one, would not serve. A French critic, M. Augustin Filon, writing of the drama of the early nineties in England, has left it on record that "Mr. Jones will not hear of the 'well-made' piece; he seems to have recognized that the architecture of a play does not count for much, and that the science of Scribe and Sardou is a snare. Nor will he hear of realism or of logic." Mr. Jones, says M. Filon, was for "Beauty, Mystery,

Passion, and Imagination. The drama, he is convinced, is returning to the mysterious and imaginative side of human life." But we may listen to the dramatist himself.

For Mr. Henry Arthur Jones is one who, like Mr. Bernard Shaw, has written a great deal about his own art, and by no means left his plays, as Sir Arthur Pinero for the most part has done, to the exposition of the critics. The secret of Mr. Jones's dissatisfaction with the teacup-and-saucer school of Robertson, which Matthew Arnold objected to as "fantastic," is rather that it "exactly copied and reproduced the littlenesses of social life." He concedes to Robertson that he gave to the theatre "a greater air of vraisemblance"; but his summary is that Robertson "drew many pleasing characters and scenes, most of them as essentially false as the falsities and theatricalities he supposed himself to be superseding." Now to the playgoer of our day this summary may well stand as a verdict; but the playgoer of our day will be pardoned, I think, if he confess his inability to conceive of a drama with a smaller air of vraisemblance than Robertson's. Suppose, however, that he concede the air of vraisemblance; it was nothing more than a device on the part of a practising dramatist to keep the theatres open—a new device, if you will, since vraisemblance, from the era of "Black-Eyed Susan" to the era of "Still Waters Run Deep," had been a great stranger

to the English drama. What exactly did Mr. Jones mean by saying that "Caste" or "School" "reproduced the littlenesses of social life"? Do they reproduce the littlenesses of social life in the manner in which De Hooch's Court of a Dutch House or Jan Steen's Music Master reproduces them? If the dramatist's purpose in drawing his picture of the interior of the Eccles household was to "copy" the life of a real household of that grade, it can only be said that he did not succeed in making a very good copy. If Mr. Jones meant that by copying life, occurrence by occurrence, like the photographer for a halfpenny newspaper, the dramatist did not go the right way about to produce a work of art, we could understand him. Then, even supposing Robertson had the ability to reproduce successfully the manner of human speech or the nature of human character—which he had not—we might agree with Mr. Jones that the result was "essentially false." But it appears that Mr. Jones meant something quite different. He meant that the reproduction of the littlenesses of social life is no work for the drama at all. He meant to deny the desirability, or at least the practicability, of reality in the theatre. "The theatre is here," he said, in effect, "to be kept open. I have kept it open with little pieces called *Harmony, A Clerical Error, Sweet Will*, and so on, of the same kind and quality as Mr. Pinero's little story of mysterious Hester. I have kept it open

with melodramas, such as *The Silver King*, in collaboration with a Mr. Herman, of which Mr. Archer conceived great hopes. I have kept it open with a realistic play called *Saints and Sinners*. In collaboration with the same Mr. Herman, I have even succeeded in keeping it open, for a short time, with the ' Doll's House ' of Ibsen, a ' Doll's House,' it is true, without a Dr. Rank, with an ending of general reconciliation, and with the new name of *Breaking a Butterfly*. I am above all a practical dramatist. My plays will never be found to forget the purposes of the theatre ; but I now propose to keep it open by returning to the mysterious and imaginative side of human life."

That is our own gloss upon the utterances of Mr. Henry Arthur Jones.

But in the year of his own *Judah* the dramatist himself put his views about Realism and Truth in this way. " The most stupendous difficulty," he wrote, " the most outrageous convention, meets the realist on the very threshold of the theatre. For the purposes of the stage, human lives have to be woven into a consecutive story, and this story has to be chopped into three or four acts of an average three-quarters of an hour each. There may be, indeed there are, dramatic *moments* in the lives of all ; there may have been dramatic scenes of *two or three minutes* in the connected lives of two or three people ; but never in this world was there anything approaching to a dramatic

three-quarters of an hour in the lives of half a dozen or a dozen people, passing in such a way and with such a volume and variety of incident and emotion as to be satisfactory or even endurable in representation to a modern audience."[1] So that, since realism cannot be truth, we are to content ourselves with Beauty, Mystery, Passion, and Imagination, chopped into three or four acts of an average three-quarters of an hour. The bargain sounds not a bad one; but before we leave it at that, let us make sure that Mr. Jones fully understood what Matthew Arnold meant when he denied realism to the English drama of Robertson. It happens that Mr. Jones, in the course of his addresses upon the drama, has clenched the matter for us in a paragraph. Let us give it prominence here:

> I lately saw a drawing of Turner's called "Llanthony Abbey." . . . It was one of the most beautiful transcripts from Nature that I have ever looked upon. But the whole picture was not two feet square. You could never mistake it for a real Abbey and real hills.

Now that is clear. We understand at once what Mr. Jones means by realism, and we understand why, as a practical dramatist, he has had nothing to do with it.

There are three kinds of "realism"—if we omit the doctrine of the schools with which we here have nothing to do. There is the lawyer's realism,

[1] Letter to New York *Dramatic Mirror*, April 19, 1890.

the actor-manager's realism, and the artist's realism. A thing is real, to the lawyer, when, like a house or a piece of land, it cannot be moved. Llanthony Abbey and the surrounding country, since they cannot be moved, are real property; Llanthony Abbey and its hills transferred to the boards of a London theatre, are "properties," but are no longer "real." When Mr. Jones pointed to this fact, he spoke like a lawyer; except that no lawyer even would think of going over a drawing by Turner with a foot-rule to convince himself that it was not an abbey. But a real property to the actor-manager is something different. Wolsey's cloak is a real property, if he himself bought it at an auction sale or borrowed it from some one who can assure him that it once was actually worn by Wolsey. But the actor-manager is not so careful in his terms as he might be; for he will go on to congratulate himself on the "realism" of his Llanthony Abbey and its hills if he do but build them up in lath and painted canvas. A property is real to the actor-manager if it cost a great deal of money and is so solid that he may lean against it; the transference of Piccadilly Circus to his stage, landmark by landmark, and taxicab by taxicab, is a triumph of "realism" to the actor-manager, even if, when he has got his lath and canvas there, it does not really resemble Piccadilly Circus in the least. There remains the artist's realism. It is because the

artist does not talk so much about his realism that the lawyer's realism and the actor-manager's realism hold the field. The actor-manager's understanding of realism, in its second sense, is particularly prevalent. The people whose business it is to write little notes upon the new novels in the papers, when they say that a work is " all duly realistic and depressing," are saying two things: they are saying that it has been the attempt of the novelist to transfer the reality of life to the printed page, and they are voicing a personal opinion that they do not like their novels to do that; but the one thing they do not say is whether the transference of life to the printed page is well or ill done. Their understanding of realism is the actor-manager's; here is Piccadilly Circus at midnight, they say, with the Criterion with white lights duly facing the Monico with pink and several taxicabs that are authentic. Because, in their opinion, there have been too many novels about Piccadilly Circus at midnight, they take the actor-manager's term " realism," and give to it a special connotation of reproach. This special connotation of reproach entitles the term, I suppose, to a fourth category of critic's realism. But there still remains the artist's realism. The artist, consciously or unconsciously, implicitly or explicitly, tells us that it is a very difficult thing to *see*. He tells us that it is a very difficult thing really to see and really to hear. He makes us aware that most of

the pictures are painted, and most of the plays and novels written, by industrious people who can neither see nor hear. It is possible that, if they had tried, they might have learned to do these difficult things; but it is more likely that they were born blind and deaf, although not, unfortunately, dumb. Every artist is an artist by virtue of his superior awareness of life. Art is the means by which life is made clear to us; the power of the artist is the power by which its inner essences are released, its escapable truths revealed, its elusive values co-ordinated. The demand for art is constant, and that is why, if artists are wanting, its functions are performed by not-artists. These are the blind who lead the blind, and, since all are blind together, nothing is easier than to agree upon a little code. You wish to be told about life? say the not-artists. We cannot clearly see its lines, nor have we the power or patience to wait upon its voice; but let us agree that it looks after this fashion, and speaks after that, and then, with you the audience lending your agreement, our invention will enable us to keep you famously supplied. This Braille system is one with which the artist who has a right pride in his faculties will have nothing to do. When he looks at life he sees it, according to his power; and he sees it to be different from the pretty picture the not-artists have agreed upon. Its voice he hears to be a different voice, because his ear is tuned to its lower tones

that have quite escaped the others. When they did not see, when they did not hear, they agreed upon conventions. Not-art is always made up of the expected; art of the unexpected. In art we may recognize the truth, and that is delightful; we may be surprised with the deeper truth, and that is still more delightful; but not-art gives us neither the pleasures of recognition nor surprise, it is the tedious repetition of the expected.

It is very difficult to look at life, then, and to see it, not as you expected to see it, but as it is. Art is not life; it is the transference of an essence into a vessel that is the artist's own—a vessel whose form is determined by the conditions of that art's acceptance. The drama, for example, can come to its public only through the theatre, and the dramatic artist shapes his vision of life for acceptance there. But this act of transference is difficult, and the greatest artist is he who achieves it with least spilled. The not-artist is he who says, because this is difficult I will not make the attempt, but will stay in my theatre and speak loudly of the immutability of its conditions. Now this essence of life may be well called its reality; and the method which secures its transference without diminution, to the theatre or to the printed page, may be called the method of realism, although less well. Realism, to speak strictly, is not a method or a theory, it is this care for undiminished reality, that is all; this care which is unconsciously

a part of all art that is romantic, and whose claims need only to be made separately vocal when the classic is running into the decadent. The theatre of the mid-nineteenth century in Europe, in so far as it was an art at all, was a decadent art; and that is the "real"-ists' and the "natural"-ists' sufficient apology. Realism—which is a better word than naturalism, because Nature has nothing to do with art, while reality has a very great deal—may be elevated into a theory or method, if we choose to think of it not merely as the artist's abiding care that reality shall suffer no diminution, but as a positive process by which, after his subject-matter has been re-created in his imagination, it is dipped into actuality again, as though to make fast its dyes. To Mr. Arthur Symons, the best English critic since Arnold, "the theory of Realism is that (a man's) emotions and ideas are to be given only in so far as the words at his command can give them," whereas the Idealist, "choosing to concern himself only with exceptional characters, and with them only in the absolute, invents for them a more elaborate and a more magnificent speech than they would naturally employ, the speech of their thoughts, of their dreams." The English drama of the time of Robertson was neither given in the words that were at the command of the people it pretended to portray, nor was its speech magnificent; it was "just fantastic." But whatever we mean by realism, so long as we do not

mean what the lawyers mean nor what the actor-managers fancy they mean, we shall be pointing to that quality in a work of art by which the reality of life is given, within the conventions that are proper and necessary to the art, without diminution. The term has, in its general applications, but a negative usefulness. To say that a work which purports to picture life is lacking in realism, is to say that it is not a good picture. But to say that it has realism is, or should be, a work of supererogation.

This digression will have been pardonable if it has served to make impossible to our minds the idea that to wear Wolsey's cloak is to give a true performance of Wolsey, or even to assist in any degree to that end ; or that to transfer Piccadilly Circus bodily into the theatre, however remarkable the endeavour, has anything whatever to do with dramatic reality. In that drama whose end, as Sir Arthur Pinero has affirmed once or twice and as Mr. Henry Arthur Jones has never tired of affirming, is to picture life, our only demand is that there shall be no diminution in the sense of reality. That we do demand this, those who have welcomed a movement towards greater realism in the English theatre not more than those who have fancied idly that it has connoted something only " sordid and depressing," is every day evident. Some well-intentioned play, one of the queer fish cast up into publicity out of the great ocean of the deservedly

unacted, will show us the boudoir of a Duchess, with her dressing-table at one end, or perhaps her bed, the safe in which she keeps her priceless necklace of black pearls at the other, and at the back a table at which her guests refresh themselves. May not the dramatist point to the convenience of his scheme, and remind us of the " most outrageous convention " which meets the realist on the very threshold of the theatre ? And yet, one and all of us, we refuse his story our belief ; and why, unless it is the diminution in reality that is the offence ? When we look at Pieter Saenredam's picture of the Church of St. Bavon as it hangs on the wall of the gallery, we shall not mistake it for a real church in Haarlem—it would be time for the curator to take us in charge if we did. But we are delighted because we are conscious that there has not been any diminution in the sense of reality ; while the artist has added, what Pater has said the best of the Dutch genre painters always added, " a more and more purged and perfected delightfulness of interest." That we shall have Mr. Jones with us when we say that this is a task of great difficulty, we know ; because we have heard him say that already. " For the purposes of the stage, human lives have to be woven into a consecutive story, and this story has to be chopped into three or four acts of an average three-quarters of an hour each." But art is difficult ; and why, alone of the arts, should the drama refuse the difficult ? Cer-

tainly the drama, over and over again, has achieved the difficult, from the "Antigone" to "Rosmersholm"; why should Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, who saw that what was wrong with the English theatre was its inability to remember the days when it was an art, have stopped at the difficult and put us off with big words? It is true that the most stupendous difficulty, the most outrageous convention meet the artist on the very threshold of the theatre; but the difficulty and convention to be met on the threshold of the theatre are no different in kind, however they may differ in degree, from the difficulty and the convention to be met on the threshold of any other of the arts. We may know the artist by his ability to overcome the difficulty and to shape the convention to the service of his vision of life. We may know him in no other way. It is because the English theatre had not shown itself able, or even anxious, to do this for a century that we know there were no artists in it; only practical dramatists, crying out about the difficulties of the theatre, and content to perform the different function of keeping it open.

No, the mistake of Mr. Henry Arthur Jones was that he thought it would be a very easy business to invent character and dialogue that would be "good enough"; that would be sufficiently lifelike, that is to say, to give us the pleasure that might fairly be demanded from the theatre. Or perhaps his mistake was in thinking that because

in his generation reality was not expected in the theatre the last way to write plays that would be successful was to bother about it. Or perhaps, again, he never thought very clearly upon the subject of dramatic reality at all. Mr. Jones's first approach to the theatre was by means of the little pieces that all the other clever fellows were writing. One of the first of these was called *Harmony*, and was about an old blind organist who drank and a young organist who got his job and fell in love with his daughter. The despair of the old blind organist was only relieved by the humours of a comic bailiff's man in possession. Enter the young organist, who tells us in an aside that the old blind organist is still to be organist, with himself as assistant organist; whereupon the old blind organist is so much moved by his daughter's invoking her mother's memory that he dashes his glass to the ground and gives up the drink for ever. Let us complete the picture of life with a fragment of speech from the bailiff's man: "It's a very pretty instrument," he says, "a jews' 'arp is; the wolume of sound aint so overpowering as a horgin." It is permissible to ask whether the dramatist with his own ear had ever heard that intrusive "w" since he laid down the works of Dickens. If not, the young Mr. Jones was already making too much of the inviolability of convention.

"After I had obtained a great financial success in melodrama, and was temporarily in a position to

write a play to please myself rather than to suit the exigencies of a theatrical manager—— " Ah, what did Mr. Jones do then ? He wrote *Saints and Sinners*. *Saints and Sinners* is the story of a Nonconformist minister of religion whose daughter is seduced by a wicked captain in the Army, who takes her to his villa to live with him. To him she says, " Eustace, Eustace, if you do not mean to make me your wife, in mercy say so, and kill me ! " To herself, in soliloquy, she says, " Oh, I have passed the boundaries, stepped over the eternal landmarks ! Yes, you are sure of me ! and I shall grow to be as wicked as you are ! Yes, as wicked," &c. To her father, who comes to the villa in search of her, she says, " Oh, don't touch me ! Don't speak to me ! Do you know what I am ? Leave me ; I'm not fit you should touch me." Nevertheless she goes home with him, and is taken to church by her father, but the tradesmen of his congregation, or perhaps it is the tradesmen's wives, will have nothing more to do with a minister whose daughter has been disgraced ; and father and daughter together pass into poverty and retirement. Here, attended by her father and her faithful early lover George, Letty nurses the sick and dies remarking, " Oh, you Christians, will you never learn to forgive ? " " But "—alas for Mr. Jones's new-found determination to please himself !—" the death-scene proving too sad for the genial associations of the theatre where it was to be performed, I

accepted a kind suggestion from a well-known critic, and changed the last scene into a happy union between Letty and George."

For the diminished reality of his story in the theatre, which, even so, he claimed to be " a study and representation of life," Mr. Jones had two excuses to put forward when he came, seven years later, when the passing of the Anglo-American Copyright Act made publication a possible course for practical dramatists, to write a preface to his play. First, the faithfulness of his play as a representation of life had, he pointed out, to be made subject to a due regard for the requirements of the modern stage ; second, such life is after all rather commonplace and uninteresting. " I do not claim any great merit for *Saints and Sinners*," he wrote, " apart from that of representing with some degree of faithfulness, and with due regard to the requirements of the modern stage, some very widely spread types of modern middle-class Englishmen. If it be objected that they are rather commonplace and uninteresting, I can only urge in defence that it is impossible to suppose that God Himself can have taken any great degree of pride in creating four-fifths of the present inhabitants of the British Islands, and can hardly be imagined as contemplating His Image in the person of the average British tradesman without a suspicion that the mould is getting a little out of shape." So Mr. Henry Arthur Jones determined

to strengthen the hand of God by smiting the Philistines and going in for Beauty, Mystery, Passion, and Imagination.

He gave us *Judah*. The Rev. Judah Llewellyn was again a Nonconformist minister of religion, but this time young, mysterious, and passionate, a sort of revivalist, "part Jewish and part Celtic"—as his name may serve to suggest. Equally young, passionate, and mysterious is Vashti, the young lady who goes about the country performing miracles of faith-healing. Now these two meet at the house of an Earl, who has an only daughter who is dying: "Fifty thousand a year, and one dying child!" as he is neatly summed up for us in an "aside." The young lady is to perform a faith-cure, and when the Earl promises her, if she is successful, anything she cares to ask for up to half his fortune, the young lady brings the Earl "down stage" and says she would like him to build a church for Judah. Then the faith-cure commences. Now you must know that Vashti's father is nothing but a common fraud, who has his daughter in his power. For the purposes of her miracle-working, he gives out that Vashti is living entirely without food; but in reality he is conveying it to her secretly every night. A Professor who is also staying with the Earl has his suspicions, and he keeps so close a watch upon the movements of the pair that Vashti really comes very near starvation. All this time, you must

understand, Judah believes in her implicitly and loves her with pure passion. It is a terrible moment for him, and the great scene of the play, when he stays up one night, as well as all the other persons, serious and comic, and learns beyond the shadow of a doubt that his Vashti, like souls of common clay, can be hungry. The revivalist has a little soliloquy all to himself :

I cannot think. Good is evil, day is night. Are you angel or devil—or both ? What are you ? The brightest star of all hell, the blackest fiend of all heaven ? What are you ? Oh, if I had died before I knew !

But Vashti is an angel, despite the fact that she lives by food ; it is her father who is a devil, and he is properly discredited and sent packing. The Earl's daughter gets better. Whereupon the Earl awards Vashti the church for Judah. But Judah, knowing what he knows, cannot accept the church. " No, Lady Eve ; there was a mistake in the title-deeds. The building stones were not sound. Yes, we will build our new church with our lives, and its foundation shall be the truth." Did not Ibsen end a play in somewhat the same manner ?

But Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, notwithstanding his adventure with " A Doll's House," did not like Ibsen any more than did Sir Arthur Pinero. One of his next plays was a play in verse about the Devil, and its prologue contained these words :

Shun the crude present with vain problems rife,
Nor join the bleak Norwegian's barren quest

> For deathless beauty's self and holy zest
> Of rapturous martyrdom in some base strife
> Of petty dullards, soused in native filth. . . .

"Petty dullards, soused in native filth"—that is Mr. Jones's word for the realistic drama. *The Tempter*, however, remains Mr. Jones's only play in verse. He obtained a great financial success with *The Dancing Girl;* he smote the Philistines in several plays; and then he sought deathless beauty's self with *Michael and His Lost Angel.*

Michael and His Lost Angel is the story of another minister of religion (Mr. Jones's drama, like the bleak Norwegian's, is rich in ministers of religion), this time a clergyman of the Church of England. The clergyman takes a serious view of sexual sin, and in the first act returns from a ceremony in which a young girl, who has been led astray, has made full confession of her fault, on his advice, in open congregation. Now the clergyman is in the habit of retiring during the week to the seclusion of an island which lies a few miles off the coast of his parish; and in this parish has come to live a beautiful lady. In the first act it is evident that the beautiful lady already has some influence over the clergyman, and he blames himself for allowing her to kiss the portrait of his mother, which is his good angel, and hangs always on the wall above his head. He sets out for his island. In the second act we see him there, and to him comes the beautiful lady. He

reproaches her, the evening wears on, the arrangements she has made for her return are found to be defective. The curtain to this act falls on the words, "No boat will come to-night! No boat will come to-night!" In the third act he is back on the mainland, rumour has been busy, and the father of the seduced young girl is telling the clergyman to mete out to himself the same measure he meted out to others. In the church built for him with the beautiful lady's money he comes face to face with her again. "The image of my sin is a reptile," he says, "a greyish green reptile, with spikes, and cold eyes without lids." He confesses his sin to his people in open congregation, and retires to a monastery in Italy. Thither comes the beautiful lady, when some years have elapsed, and dies in his arms. The clergyman, beneath the portrait of his mother, the good angel he has lost, goes on living to expiate his sin.

The play was, said Mr. Joseph Knight, "in the full sense a masterpiece," and certainly it is difficult to see why it should have failed to succeed in the theatre for which it was written. We are told that the impression got abroad that there was "something immoral in the part of Audrey Lesden"; but then, there was something immoral in the part of Paula Tanqueray, and that did not keep people away. It is possible to contemplate *Michael and His Lost Angel* being given to the world again, as it is hardly possible to contemplate

Judah. The parallel instances of the young girl's sin and that of the clergyman point forward to Mr. Galsworthy's drama. It may be remarked that the degree of faithfulness Mr. Jones permitted himself in his representation of life had still a due regard for the requirements of the modern stage. When it is necessary that we should learn about his heroine, we do so in this way : " What do you know of her ?—Merely what I wrote you in my letter. That she was, etc. etc. etc. Her great-grandfather, I believe, was——" and so on. When the third act opens, and we do not know what happened on the island, " Let us go carefully through it all as it happened, to make sure," say the guilty pair, and they do so, and greatly oblige us.

But if we wish to see the height of Mr. Henry Arthur Jones's achievement in the kind of play that is a study and representation of life, we pass on to *Mrs. Dane's Defence. Mrs. Dane's Defence* is the story of the struggle of a young woman, who has been unfortunate, to keep her place in suburban society. Having been mixed up in an ugly Continental scandal, she comes back to England and pretends to be some one else. In her capacity as some one else, she becomes engaged to marry the adopted son of a judge. But she has to cope with the judge. In the great scene of the play the judge cross-examines her in the privacy of his suburban library upon the story of her life. We watch him out-matching her—out-matching

her at every point. The question comes, "When was the last time you saw your cousin Felicia Hindemarsh?"; then, "Woman, you're lying! . . . You are Felicia Hindemarsh." Our sympathy is carefully retained for Mrs. Dane; she is not a bad woman, nobody warned her, she never had a chance. In the end, while she is not allowed to marry the judge's son, she is allowed to keep her place in suburban society; the judge's son falls back upon a young girl who has loved him all the time, and her aunt makes every one happy by consenting to marry the judge. The first thing that strikes the contemporary playgoer when he is faced with *Mrs. Dane's Defence* is that here is a play which ought to exist for the sake of a woman who lied because of her deep love, but which exists in fact for the sake of a high-handed, if sympathetic judge.

It is the Trail of the Actor-Manager that we have come upon. The dramatist blazed this trail with *The Silver King*, and he has never ceased to follow it. We understand now what Mr. Jones meant by a due regard for the requirements of the modern stage. The "requirements of the modern stage" are the Actor-Manager's requirements. The Actor-Manager's requirements are, stated shortly, that he shall be "a bright, shrewd man of the world, about fifty" with a third act in which to decide the destinies of several persons, a fourth act in which to lay siege successfully to a younger heart

that has long held out against him—although how it has succeeded so long in holding out against his masterful charm remains a mystery—and a free permission throughout all four acts to tell the story of his life, whenever it may seem to him to be apposite. It will be found that *Mrs. Dane's Defence* fulfils all these requirements, just as satisfactorily as do Mr. Henry Arthur Jones's principal comedies, with which we shall have to deal in a moment. The Actor-Manager, we are at liberty to suppose, was that "most outrageous convention," which, it will be remembered, met the realist on the very threshold of the theatre. For the purposes of the Actor-Manager human lives have to be woven into a consecutive story, and this story has to be chopped into three or four acts of an average three-quarters of an hour each, because that is the length the Actor-Manager likes best.

In the fact that Mr. Jones writes Speeches for Actor-Managers we have the key to his dramatic diction, whether comic or serious. This is from the serious play we have just been regarding:

SIR DANIEL. When I came up to London to read for the Bar, I fell very desperately in love with my landlady's sister, a lady some six years older and some two stone heavier than myself. She was in the mantle business, and wore a large crinoline. I used to call her my Bonnie Louisa. My father got wind of it, came up to town and promptly shattered our apple-cart; sent Bonnie Louisa flying to Paris, and packed me off on a judicial commission to India.

LAL. I don't see the point of the story, sir.

SIR DANIEL. Twelve years after, I happened to be coming down the Edgware Road on a Sunday morning, and I met Bonnie Louisa with a husband and five children, all in their Sunday best.

LAL. Still I don't see the point, sir.

SIR DANIEL. I did! I hurried to church and devoutly thanked Heaven that my father had had the sense and the courage to do for me what I'm trying to do for you to-night. [*Very firmly.*] Now, my boy, you'll take this post under Sir Robert Jennings.

That is the Actor-Manager in the act of managing. It is true that the point of his story (which we cannot blame Lionel for not seeing) in real life would be grossly insulting to the lady his son is in love with, but we need not mind about that—it gets its effect in Mr. Jones's theatre, where no one minds about real life, but only about Beauty, Mystery, Passion, and Imagination. And now for the Actor-Manager in comedy:

ELAINE. There is an immense future for Woman——

SIR RICHARD [*interrupting*]. At her own fireside. There is an immense future for women as wives and mothers, and a very limited future for them in any other capacity. While you ladies without passions—or with distorted and defeated passions—are raving and trumpeting all over the country, that wise grim old grandmother of us all, Dame Nature, is simply laughing up her sleeve and snapping her fingers at you and your new epochs and your new movements. Go home! Be sure that old Dame Nature will choose her own darlings to carry on her own schemes. Go home! Go home! Nature's darling woman is a stay-at-home woman, a woman who wants to be a good wife and a good mother, and cares very little for anything else.

[ELAINE *is about to speak,* SIR RICHARD *silences her with a gesture.*] Go home! Go home, and don't worry the world any longer about this tiresome sexual business, for, take my word, it was settled once for all in the Garden of Eden, and there's no more to be said about it. Go home! Go home! Go home!

ELAINE [*furious*]. Sir Richard, you are grossly indelicate!

SIR RICHARD [*blandly*]. I am. So's Nature. [*Cheerfully.*] Now I must go and dress for dinner.

Cannot you hear the rising inflexions of the voice, so familiar and so lovable? What chance for Susan to remain Rebellious, with such a manager among uncles about the house? It is a delightful world, this in which the Actor-Manager lives. There is provision for applause as he enters it: "Oh, nonsense, Nepean; you're mistaken"—(his first sentence must be just long enough for him to get it out before the applause breaks in.) Once on the stage, he moves through this world, blandly interrupting people with his wisdom of it, cheerfully moving off to dress for dinner when they offer to reply. The condition of their existence around him is that they serve him with easy dialectic lobs that he may smite to the boundary. "Ah, pardon my inexperience," he says, and they feel properly crushed. His habitual tone, whether he be the distinguished Q.C., the well-known judge, or merely the famous soldier, is "the tone of a skilful cross-examiner who is leading his witness unsuspectingly on." He manages them not only by moral suasion, but by physical force as well; "driving them

nearer to each other," or heading off a recalcitrant wife down stage. When the moment comes he illustrates the action with a chapter from the story of his life. " I've had one great love story in my life," he says. " Shall I tell you about it ? " To the foolish young, " I've been twenty-five " is his all-sufficient answer. " I'm not a hero," he says ; " I'm not on a pedestal, I never put on a moral toga. But I owe no woman a sigh or a sixpence. I've never wronged any man's sister, or daughter, or wife." He has had, of course, his " little amours " ; would he be the man he is, able to manage everybody's business, if he had not ? " I became successful, and met other women, had my affairs with them—I won't call them love-affairs—some of them graceful, some of them romantic, none of them quite degrading . . ." Even the Devil, in Mr. Jones's poetical play, has the principles of the Actor-Manager :

> It isn't fair to tell against a woman.
> You've had your frolic ; now be wise. Forget her.

Out of the Actor-Manager's youthful frolics has come the wisdom he is able to impart to other men : " That's all right. Love 'em, worship 'em, make the most of 'em ! Go down on your knees every day and thank God for having sent them into this dreary world for our good and comfort. But, don't break your heart over 'em ! Don't ruin your career for 'em ! Don't lose a night's rest for 'em !

They're not worth it [*very softly*]—except one!" It is a delightful world for Actor-Managers. "Go home!" he has but to say, for Lady Susan to go back to her husband, for Lady Jessica to go back to her husband, for Mrs. Dane to go out into the night and to her child. And when lovers are finished parting, because he tells them to, he turns and secures his own loved One in the end.

This "outrageous convention" of the Actor-Manager was good enough to produce *Mrs. Dane's Defence* on the one hand; it was good enough to produce *The Liars* on the other. *The Liars* remains the most representative artificial comedy of its generation, and the masterpiece of Mr. Henry Arthur Jones. It shows at their best its author's powers of pleasant play construction, less stiffly formal than Pinero's; it exhibits some understanding of comic diction as existing apart from Oscar Wilde. We are bound to find Wilde's influence on his elder contemporary in the theatre marked very clearly, but *Mrs. Dane's Defence* owes more to the author of "Lady Windermere's Fan" than *The Liars* owes to the author of "The Importance of Being Earnest." The Canon and the Bulsom-Porters, as constituent figures in the play about the woman who was not a bad woman, have moments, even in their diction, which bring to mind the dramatist who, for a little interlude in his own work as artist, joined in the game of keeping the theatres open. But *The Liars* is quite definitely

Mr. Henry Arthur Jones's own. We may see its author's powers of comic diction, more particularly in an effective use of verbal repetition. "Give me a woman that lets a man call his soul his own," says Freddie Tatton. "That's all I want, Coke, to call my soul my own." When Lady Jessica has run her risk, the dreadful Risk of Becoming Déclassée, her reiterated story is quite funny, "I must have taken the wrong turning, for instead of finding myself at the station I found myself at the 'Star and Garter.'" Dolly, who is to say that she too dined there, is quite willing to stick to it, "Only I should like to know where I dined. Where did I dine?" In other ways, too, Mr. Jones comes near to wit. "I will be a cipher no longer," says Freddie, to which his wife replies, "Run away to your club, Freddie, and think over what figure you would like to be. I dare say we can arrange it." "Your Freddie is such a poor little pocket-edition of a man," says Lady Jessica; while Sir Christopher's word for the amusing third-act imbroglio is the right one, "We're taking too many partners into this concern." For the rest, the play is Sir Christopher's, in the manner we have seen; and as for the indiscretion of Lady Jessica, it is no more than Lady Susan's, "There wasn't even so much as an innocent flirtation! There wasn't indeed!" This earlier comedy, *The Case of Rebellious Susan*, foreshadowed *The Liars* in the closest possible fashion, sharing its form without

quite attaining to its distinctness of comic dialogue or imbroglio. It is instructive to read of Sir Richard, in his managing scene, that "whenever the business of the stage allows it, he shows to the audience that he is most keenly watching every word, movement, and glance"; for in the Play for Actor-Managers, than Stage Business there was no more important contributory part.

Mr. Henry Arthur Jones has written other plays, both comic and serious. In some, like *The Manœuvres of Jane*, the Actor-Manager was provided with little else than Stage Business; he fell into the sea and got wet, being a comic rather than a sympathetic Actor-Manager. In other comedies, in the quarrelling scene of *Dolly Reforming Herself* in particular, there was some of the old adroitness of the lying scene in *The Liars*; in *The Ogre*, the Actor-Manager nailed up the breeches over the fireplace, and the familiar cadences about Woman had all the old ring; but in his more serious plays, it must be concluded, Mr. Jones has ceased to attract. Since we failed to recognize ourselves in *The Hypocrites* he has taken to smiting the Philistines in studies and representations of English life that are consumed in America, where perhaps they find them quite satisfying. Is it possible that the English theatre has passed on to something with a greater air of vraisemblance? The dramatist of *The Liars* knew the names of all the wines and sauces,

but very little about the heart of man. We owe him many pleasing characters and scenes, most of them as essentially false as the falsities and theatricalities he supposed himself, like Robertson, to be superseding. "Wonder at nothing that you find in the heart of a woman, or the heart of a man," we read at the end of Lady Susan's comedy, "God has put everything there." No, it was not the hand of God, but the hand of the practical dramatist; and that is why there is nothing there to wonder at.

III

OSCAR WILDE

MR. HENRY ARTHUR JONES once spoke of his endeavour as "to bring some kind of style and form into the art of playwriting," but it was Oscar Wilde who really did this. Wilde's importance to the English drama is that, at whatever cost in other things, he made clear the necessity of style. Characteristically, in giving the English drama style again he took care to rob it of sincerity. "In all the unimportant matters sincerity, not style," he wrote as critic, "is the essential. In all important matters, style, not sincerity, is the essential." Pleased with this, as artist he gave it to one of the best of the persons in his trivial comedy to say again. Now the greatest of Wilde's claims upon our gratitude is that to him the drama was a matter of importance. It was a matter of grave importance, not as it is to tradesmen, because it serves to keep the theatres open, but as it is to the artist, because it is an opportunity for the personal expression of something that has

beauty. "The artist is the creator of beautiful things" were the first words of that credo which Wilde set as a preface in the forefront of his *Dorian Gray*. It is his greatest claim upon our gratitude that when he came to the theatre he did not forget this. It will not do to be misled by the fact that he wrote "trivially" for it into thinking that the theatre was not, to Wilde, an important matter. To write trivially was one of Wilde's poses. Perhaps it was the favourite of his poses to be trivial about those things which are far too important, as he would say, ever to be serious about.

We do well to start thus with an antithesis, even if it be only the well-worn antithesis between style and sincerity. Of course there is no true antithesis between style and sincerity; sincerity, on the contrary, is the greatest possible producer of good style; but Wilde must have his antithesis. His comedy is the comedy of antithesis. Verbally (and in writing of the drama of Wilde one naturally writes of its verbal aspects first), verbally the joy in a Wilde comedy is nearly always the sudden joy of the antithesis. "I assure you that the amount of things I and my poor dear sister were taught not to understand was quite extraordinary. But modern women understand everything, I am told." This degenerates very simply into the trick antithesis, with its lesser joy or no joy at all, of which Wilde's worser comedies are full; the mere putting

of the unlikely word against the likely—" I can't understand this modern mania for curates . . . I think it most irreligious " ; " Don't be led astray into the paths of virtue," and so on. But what is easily called paradox, and dismissed, is often something quite true, to the statement of which an antithetical form has been, perhaps perversely, imparted. For example, we have Cecily's diary, which " is simply a very young girl's record of her own thoughts and impressions, and consequently meant for publication." Conventionally, we expect the " not " ; but who would say, with memories extending from Harriette Wilson to Marie Bashkirtseff, and later, that the unconventional here is not the witty expression of the truth ? We shall often find in Wilde's work, at its best, the truth of the unconventional ; the truth, if you like, of masks. We may note at once that his comic method is frequently the Omission of the Expected. Wilde's characteristic use of the comic dramatist's weapon of surprise is a kind of amalgam of surprise plus recognition, as in the incident of Cecily's diary. And this may fittingly bring us to character. By Wilde's antithetical method, a delicate flavouring of satire is imparted to dialogue that is yet not falsified beyond recognition of its essential truth. Wilde cared far more for speaking personally through his people than for giving them that life by which they might speak for themselves, but their speech is often not untrue to character

because character has been so skilfully selected and limited.

The characters of Wilde's comedies may be divided into those that are plain and those that are coloured by their author's more personal predilections. The coloured are more numerous than the plain, and certainly more interesting. The plain are the " good women "—Lady Windermere, Lady Chiltern, Mrs. Arbuthnot, and Hester, the American young woman; these are sometimes allowed a dash of verbal colour it takes all their Puritanism or their interest in the Housing of the Poor to resist, and Mrs. Erlynne, that good woman, merges nearly into the coloured. There are the good men, of which Lord Windermere and Sir Robert Chiltern are one type, and Gerald Arbuthnot, the " straight " boy, is another. John Worthing has to be serious for the purposes of the trivial comedy, and so, lest he, too, lapse into something of his author's incurable zest, he is made a J.P. But the method of antithesis is clearly seen to be still at work in the matter of character when we compare Jack even for a moment with the trivial Algernon who is set down beside him. Algernon Moncrieff, the Bunburyist, is the type of which Viscount Goring, Lord Darlington, Lord Illingworth, younger or older, more amusing or less amusing, are but variations. These are the coloured persons, who shine with the reflected glow of the gossamer good things it delighted Wilde to

let fly from their mouths—his own good things, we are certain, more often than not. Other persons, coloured still with his own idiosyncrasy, but adversely as it were, figures of satire, are Tuppy, the most good-natured man in London; the young fools—Cecil Graham, who likes people to ask him how he is, and Dumby, who has been wildly, madly adored; the old fools—the Earl of Caversham, Canon Chasuble, and the Archdeacon. There are the discreetly uncommunicative men-servants, one of whom surprises Goring and us by his "clever talk" into a sudden memory of the Duchess of Berwick's little chatterbox. This brings us to the women, and we may well begin with the young ones.

"The most wonderful thing in the world—youth! There is nothing like youth," says Lord Illingworth. It is impossible to deny to Wilde's comedies a sincere zest in youth. His triumphant young girls, talking glibly, are its embodiment. "How a little love and good company improves a woman!" says Mrs. Sullen in the old comedy; and we think of the words in regard to Wilde's Cecily Cardew, for the first time in the theatre since Lady Teazle. Over against Cecily with her watering-can is set Gwendolen and her lorgnette, with great art; both are delightfully youthful, although Gwendolen is as obviously suited to the serious Jack as Cecily is to the trivial Algernon, since it is likeness that satisfies, as

Mr. John Stuart Mill has informed us, however unlikeness may attract. Wilde's zest in youth overflows into his stage directions : " enter Mabel Chiltern in the most ravishing frock." It is a particularly jolly way he has of poking fun at himself in his stage directions ; after Lady Basildon has entered and reminded him of an idyll by Watteau, after Lord Caversham has entered and proved to be like a portrait by Lawrence, after Mrs. Cheveley has entered looking rather like an orchid, Mabel enters, and " to sane people," we read, " she is not reminiscent of any work of art." She and Goring " blow kisses," like Gwendolen and Jack on another occasion. " Lady Bracknel looks vaguely about as if she could not understand what the noise was." Lady Bracknel is the type of the first of Mrs. Allonby's categories for her elders, " the dowagers," with the Duchess of Berwick, Lady Hunstanton, and Lady Markby for paler embodiments ; " the dowdies " are Lady Jedburgh, Lady Caroline Pontefract, and so on. The contemporaries of Mrs. Allonby, " types of exquisite fragility," women not quite young but certainly not quite old, are Lady Plymdale and Lady Stutfield, the latter of whom goes through two comedies, one graceful kneel. " But do you really think a man's chin can be too square ? I think a man should look very, very strong, and that his chin should be quite, quite square." Impossible to deny to Lady Stutfield (though her too-too style

is the very most personal thing, reading rather like a good-natured parody of Wilde's own) a general truth to the little parcel of brilliantly observed traits that make up her character. She is as true to character, and as true to her creator, as Lady Bracknel is when she speaks about Land.

In Wilde's comic dialogue, inconsequence plays as large a part as the antithetical quality we have noted. Indeed, the one comes in with the other; the inconsequence is a kind of antithesis so amusingly strained as to give rise to the pleasure of surprise. Antithesis serves its purpose to tell the plain truth; for example, "Only dull people are brilliant at breakfast." But Wilde's comedies are filled with persons who are amiably incompetent to speak plainly the truth or anything else. They themselves are set over against the clever people, the people who never mean a single word they say. "My dear," the former remark, "how can you say that? There is no resemblance between the two things at all." Their own way is to put two and two together. They "run on." A country some of whose States are as big as France and England put together suggests to Lady Caroline a country that is very draughty, and a draught suggests mufflers, and mufflers her husband, who won't wear his. A consequence so devastating in its literalness we can only call inconsequence. Wilde perfected this kind of comic inconsequence. There is inconsequence for its own sake:

LADY BRACKNEL. Well, I must say, Algernon, that I think it is high time Mr. Bunbury made up his mind whether he was going to live or to die. This shilly-shallying with the question is absurd. Nor do I in any way approve of the modern sympathy with invalids. I consider it morbid. Illness of any kind is hardly a thing to be encouraged in others. Health is the primary duty of life. I am always telling that to your poor uncle, but he never seems to take much notice . . . as far as any improvement in his ailments goes. I should be much obliged if you would ask Mr. Bunbury, from me, to be kind enough not to have a relapse on Saturday, for I rely on you to arrange my music for me. It is my last reception, and one wants something that will encourage conversation, particularly at the end of the season when every one has practically said whatever they had to say, which, in most cases, was probably not much.

There is inconsequence elevated into a method :

LORD GORING. Well, the fact is, father, this is not my day for talking seriously. I am very sorry, but it is not my day.

LORD CAVERSHAM. What do you mean, sir ?

LORD GORING. During the Season, father, I only talk seriously on the first Tuesday in every month, from four to seven.

LORD CAVERSHAM. Well, make it Tuesday, sir, make it Tuesday.

LORD GORING. But it is after seven, father, and my doctor says I must not have any serious conversation after seven. It makes me talk in my sleep.

LORD CAVERSHAM. Talk in your sleep, sir ? What does that matter ? You are not married.

LORD GORING. No, father, I am not married.

LORD CAVERSHAM. Hum ! That is what I have come to talk to you about, sir. . . .

The twists and turns of Lady Bracknel's diction—one clause capping another only to be capped again, the whole giving the impression that she speaks whatever comes into her head without, however, by some unlikely dispensation of Providence, ever for a moment losing her author's fine sense of phrase—are matched by the twists and turns of Wilde's dramatic action. It is in this that the trick of inconsequence serves him, as a deliberate method by which to get back on to the right line again. In a serious drama like Wilde's, which is for the most part valuable for its comic interpolations, some such method is essential. He called his novel " an essay on decorative art," and that is a name that might be given to each of the modern plays in its turn.

For it is not the theme that we remember, it is the comic passages with which the theme is decorated. There is some effect of comic observation that he wishes to make, and he makes it; he does not mind where. The reputation of a good woman, the happiness of wife and husband, may hang in the balance; we are not to be denied our comic interlude:

DUMBY. Good evening, Lady Stutfield. I suppose this will be the last ball of the season?

LADY STUTFIELD. I suppose so, Mr. Dumby. It's been a delightful season, hasn't it?

DUMBY. Quite delightful! Good evening, Duchess. I suppose this will be the last ball of the season?

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. I suppose so, Mr. Dumby. It has been a very dull season, hasn't it?

DUMBY. Dreadfully dull! Dreadfully dull!

MRS. COWPER-COWPER. Good evening, Mr. Dumby. I suppose this will be the last ball of the season?

DUMBY. Oh, I think not. There'll probably be two more.

A drama written for the sake of its interludes can hardly be anything but inconsequent. That is why *The Importance of Being Earnest* is immeasurably the best of these plays, because it is all inconsequence.[1] Inconsequence for its own sake, inconsequence as a method of getting forward, what does it matter, where everything in character and dialogue has an equally delightful inconsequence? A play in which Algernon can eat all the cucumber sandwiches prepared for his aunt, Lady Bracknel, and quarrel with Jack because he takes one, and silence his obvious retort with "That is quite a different matter. She is my aunt," and leave us feeling that he has spoken quite properly, is a play that has evidently set up its own conventions, and achieved a quite perfect success within them. The inconsequence of *The Importance of Being Earnest* is the gay inconsequence of youth, and its consistency is wonderful. It is something a world apart from the trick inconsequence by which the lady

[1] "There is no use adding 'place' and 'time' to the scenario, as the unities are not in the scheme. In art I am Platonic, not Aristotelian—tho' I wear my Plato 'with a difference.'"—*Wilde, Letter to a friend, December* 18, 1898 (unpublished).

in the would-be serious play, when she is told that there is an orchid in her greenhouse as beautiful as the seven deadly sins, is made to say, " My dear, I hope there is nothing of the kind. I will certainly speak to the gardener."

The whole of Wilde's comic dialogue is notable for its sense of phrase, its general high-pressure excellence, and, in particular, its deft use of repetition. When that admirable father of Lord Goring's makes a habit of turning up at the wrong moment, " It is very heartless of him, very heartless indeed," we are told, and the words are no one's but Wilde's. Perfectly simply, they succeed in being quite full of character. There is the repetition of phrase and idea. Repetition in the theatre has its own curious effectiveness, so much greater than we should expect, or could give any good reason for. The journeymen know this, and make use of repetition for the enforcing of tension or the imparting of some point of information we must on no account miss—often so crudely as to destroy the emotional effect they are trying to build. Wilde took up all the instruments of the theatrical journeymen, as we shall see more fully in a moment, but he generally proved his ability to use them more suitably. The repeated word or phrase or idea is a case in point. It is an instrument that Wilde is delighted to play upon. Its simplest effect may be illustrated quite easily, as when Lord Goring, having turned the tables

upon Mrs. Cheveley, returns to her the remark she has addressed to him a few minutes before, " Oh ! don't use big words. They mean so little "—with an enormous accumulation in their effectiveness. Wilde is for ever pulling off little effects of that sort. But his use of dramatic repetition becomes his own when he begins to play variations upon it. Who but Wilde would have given to the Duchess dear nieces, purely in order that she might tell us again, at a much later stage, " It's those horrid nieces of mine—the Saville girls—they're always talking scandal " ? And what is *The Importance of Being Earnest* but a triumph of the deftly repeated motive ? It is funny to hear in the first act from Gwendolen's lips that there is something in that name that inspires absolute confidence ; it is more than twice as funny in the second act to hear from Cecily's lips the same thing ; and further than that Wilde does not go, for he understands, as the common writer of farce does not, the precise point at which repetition ceases to be serviceable.[1] He never makes the mistake of thinking that because

[1] His plays have the artist's fear of over-emphasis, in a theatre where over-emphasis is the journeyman's substitute for clearness of design and diction. " In printing the new play, will you see that, instead of italics, the words emphasized are *spaced* . . . ? It is, I believe, a Swedish idea, but in spite of that I like it. Italics are to me over-emphasis."—*Wilde, Letter to a friend, March* 20, 1899 (unpublished).

one baby or one pair of lovers is funny, and because two babies or two pairs of lovers are twice as funny, that six babies or six pairs of lovers are of necessity six times as funny. Shakespeare might have made the wood near Athens far more populous with lovers, but he did not; Wilde might have gone on adding to the number of those inspired by the name of Ernest, but he did not; both were masters of the art of dramatic repetition. But perhaps Wilde's subtlest achievement in the art is the Duchess of Berwick's little chatterbox, who makes "Yes, mamma," serve all the purposes of polite conversation, including engagement in marriage. She may vary her intonation, she may be permitted the luxury of an interrogation point or even of a note of exclamation, but by the words her author has given her she is bound; and yet it is impossible to say she is false to character. This is her apotheosis:

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. Agatha, darling! [*Beckons her over*].

LADY AGATHA. Yes, mamma!

DUCHESS OF BERWICK [*aside*]. Did Mr. Hopper definitely——

LADY AGATHA. Yes, mamma.

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. And what answer did you give him, dear child?

LADY AGATHA. Yes, mamma.

DUCHESS OF BERWICK [*affectionately*]. My dear one! You always say the right thing. Mr. Hopper! James! Agatha has told me everything. How cleverly you have both kept your secret

HOPPER. You don't mind my taking Agatha off to Australia, then, Duchess ?

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. To Australia ? Oh, don't mention that dreadful vulgar place.

HOPPER. But she said she'd like to come with me.

DUCHESS OF BERWICK [*severely*]. Did you say that, Agatha ?

LADY AGATHA. Yes, mamma.

DUCHESS OF BERWICK. Agatha, you say the most silly things possible. . . .

" It is perfectly phrased "—as the clever people in Wilde's comedies retort upon the plain people when they ask what is meant. Before we leave, for the moment, the verbal side of Wilde's art, we shall do well to notice his mastery of the perfect phrase. The Archdeacon, for example, whose conversation for the drawing-room is limited to the exceptional ailments of Mrs. Archdeacon :

THE ARCHDEACON. Her deafness is a great privation to her. She can't even hear my sermons now. She reads them at home. But she has many resources in herself, many resources.

LADY HUNSTANTON. She reads a good deal, I suppose ?

THE ARCHDEACON. Just the very largest print. The eyesight is rapidly going. But she's never morbid, never morbid.

" The eyesight is rapidly going "—how perfect that choice of the definite article, and how irresistible ! It is for his mastery over these little matters of appeal to the ear that Wilde the dramatist can hardly be over-valued. His drama is " perfectly phrased."

But it would be a mistake to assume that Wilde's complement as a dramatist stops short at a hold over words. It is easy to see that a writer whose diction was so self-consciously clear-cut, the best of whose work had always the quality of good conversation, would turn to the theatre to hear, as it were, his own voice. The theatre was to Wilde the mirror, into which only, according to his *Salomé*, we should look. When he comes to the theatre, however, we see, not by his sense of speech alone, that for the theatre he is predestinate. Another and infinitely more subtle mastery is Wilde's. Its symbol is the famous entry of Jack, "dressed in the deepest mourning," into the second act of *The Importance of Being Earnest.* Here is something, it cannot be too strongly emphasized, that is altogether above speech. It may stand for the elusive part of the dramatist's art, by which, above all other gifts, if he have it, we know him to be a dramatist. It is the ability to *use* the theatre, none of its multiplex opportunities going unemployed. One would say that it is the black standing figure, so solemnly intrusive, that causes the laughter to go up, percussion upon repercussion. But there is nothing irresistibly hilarious in a figure dressed in deep mourning, even in sheer physical contrast with an English garden on an afternoon in July. The preparation is everything. It is the triumph of comic preparation of which our laughter is the sign. Wilde's mastery

of dramatic *preparation* is something that so rarely deserted him that we are bound to concede it to him as one of the most native of his gifts. Look only at the first act of this comedy, the sandwiches, the mystery of Ernest, the intriguing mention of Cecily, the Bunburying, the artfully nonchalant curtain that leaves us so furiously wishing to go on. This first act is the perfect preparation for everything in the comedy that surprisingly follows ; the sufficient preparation, the only just and most beautifully sufficient preparation, for the entry of Jack dressed in mourning for the non-existent brother who is at present making love to Cecily in the garden. There is not a word too little, there is not a word too much ; unjeopardized, the effect is an effect of comic preparation unequalled in the English theatre in its delicate certainty since Sheridan's screen fell down. Wilde never did anything else quite so good, because he never wrote any other comedy nearly so spontaneously perfect ; but we may find in all his work the same ability. The return of Lord Goring from the conservatory, in the fourth act of *An Ideal Husband*, " with an entirely new buttonhole," is, on a smaller scale of preparation, just the same thing ; we know, from talk of buttonholes, from talk of " the usual palm-tree " in the conservatory, just who has made the buttonhole for him ; the incident is only less exciting in the theatre because its importance is subsidiary and not central. It is the achievement

of Jack's entry that every single thread of the comedy is drawn up into this moment, a moment whose appeal would seem to be visual merely. It is the misfortune of the best things in the other comedies of Wilde that they are but subsidiary to a central theme that does not interest us at all. This is the penalty of Wilde's cleverness, out of which he wrote his plays about good women and long-suffering politicians, to please the actor-managers, and to win for himself some kind of a mirror into which he might look, albeit flawed.

But if Wilde in these plays is clever, he is not stupid-clever, in that useful distinction of Lord Goring's. The third act of *An Ideal Husband* really is the " greatest " of " great " scenes. We may imagine its author, although not caring at all for the reputation of his innocent woman nor for the villainy of his villainess, yet taking pleasure in the thought that he had beaten the journeymen at their own game. It will be remembered that we have Mrs. Cheveley hidden in the drawing-room, and the efforts of Goring, believing it is Lady Chiltern who is there, to keep Chiltern from opening the door. We have the scene of the bracelet between Goring and Mrs. Cheveley, in which he turns the tables upon her. We have the scene of the letter, with its ironic conclusion, " Thanks. I am never going to try to harm Robert Chiltern again "—" Fortunately you have

not the chance, Mrs. Cheveley," when she has just stolen the letter before our eyes. There is the brilliant invention of the end ; serving to carry us over to the fourth act with its moment of surprising dramatic irony again, " . . . at all costs it must not reach him. [*Goes to the door and opens it.*] Oh ! Robert is coming upstairs with the letter in his hand." When Sir Arthur Pinero sets a scheming woman to listen in an antechamber, we are to believe that the most terrible consequences for all concerned hang in the balance. When Mrs. Cheveley is discovered, and the question put to her whether listening to wonderful things through keyholes is not rather like tempting Providence, her reply is, " Oh ! surely Providence can resist temptation by this time," and the scene is less than the epigram which is its conclusion and excuse. Just the same careless brilliance marks Wilde's other " great scenes "—the third act of *Lady Windermere*, with its business of the burned letter, the fan, and the unobserved exit ; the third act of *A Woman of No Importance*, with the kissing of Hester by Illingworth and the " Stop, Gerald, stop ! He is your own father ! "—a culmination for which we have been prepared as skilfully as Lady Windermere's simple words to her servant, " I am particularly anxious to hear the names quite clearly," prepare us for what is to follow in that play. Wilde's work for the managers, careless in detail, insincere in essentials as it may be, yet

shows him always with but little to learn about the mystery of the theatre.

The insincerity we need not labour. That the so-called *De Profundis* has sincerity is an arguable proposition, although, since it is an "important matter," those who make much of sincerity would probably be better advised, on Wilde's own showing, to let their admiration stop short at the style. But the insincerity of the emotional crises shared in by Lady Windermere and Mrs. Erlynne, by Illingworth and Gerald and Hester and Mrs. Arbuthnot, by Sir Robert and Lady Chiltern, is sufficiently established by the fact that they do not interest us. Evidence, if external evidence be wanted, is not lacking that they did not interest Wilde. If Wilde's real interest in his first play for the London theatre had been in the "good woman" it was ostensibly about, he would not have allowed the ending of its first act to be altered in representation. It will be remembered that the scene as Wilde wrote it reads as follows:

> LORD WINDERMERE [*calling after her*]. Margaret! Margaret! [*A pause.*] My God! What shall I do? I dare not tell her who this woman really is. The shame would kill her.
>
> [*Sinks down into a chair and buries his face in his hands.*]

But in the theatre these words were given, "My God! What shall I do? I dare not tell her that this woman is her MOTHER!" They were so

given with the approval of the author, although continued interest in the central theme of the play becomes quite impossible if we learn the truth any earlier than the point near the end of the second act at which the author had originally taken care to impart it. But it did not matter. Neither he nor we are under any delusion that it seriously mattered. The only importance of this maladroit piece of interference with the " sympathetic " story of a woman more sinned against than sinning is that it spoiled a pretty pattern. To write a play whose first act ended " Oh ! no one. No one in particular. A woman of no importance," and whose last act ended " Oh ! no one. No one in particular. A man of no importance," went for far more with Wilde, it is likely, than the story of a woman's wrongs triumphed over which came in between. It must have been so, or it could not have happened that the most interesting thing about the completed story is its decoration. In fact Wilde is at one with Mr. Bayes of " The Rehearsal " in saying, " Why, what the devil is a Plot good for, but to bring in fine things ? "

And now it is time to turn from the group of plays which Wilde wrote out of his cleverness to please the managers, to the group of plays which he wrote to please himself. These are not absolute groups : *The Importance of Being Earnest*, while finding its genesis in the first, can have no possible cause for separation from the second ; while *Vera*,

one may surmise, was written less to please himself than to please the United States of America. Still, there is good reason for separating *Vera*, *The Duchess of Padua*, *Salomé*, *La Sainte Courtisane*, and *A Florentine Tragedy* from the body of the modern or drawing-room plays, if it is only a reason of convenience. That it is little more will be plain when it is remembered that *Vera* and *The Duchess of Padua* were very early plays, that *Salomé* dates from the year of Wilde's first entry into the commercial theatres, and that *La Sainte Courtisane* and *A Florentine Tragedy*, partly written in the year of his exit from the theatres, were left still uncompleted at his death.

The only possible importance of *Vera* is that it shows Wilde to have been possessed quite early of what is sometimes called an aptitude for the theatre. The dramatist who put out the lights at the end of the first act of *An Ideal Husband*—so that the room became almost dark, the only light there was coming from the great chandelier that hung over the staircase and illumined the tapestry of the Triumph of Love—differed only in length of experience from the dramatist who gave to the first act of his drama of Russian revolution, an inn scene, a "large door opening on snowy landscape at back of stage." This play about a Tsarevitch who turns to the cause of the people is remarkable, otherwise, for nothing but aptitude in its worser sense; an aptitude to write like

Shakespeare—" warmed by the same sun, nurtured by the same air, fashioned of flesh and blood like to our own, wherein are they different to us (*sic*), save that they starve while we surfeit," etc. etc. ; a young man's aptitude to work himself into great excitement over a theme for which he does not really care in the least. Much of *Vera* is written in a prose which unfortunately proves to be verse : " Our wedding night !—And if Death came himself, methinks that I could kiss his pallid mouth, and suck sweet poison from it," and so on. The next play is written in what may be called intentional verse, and is certainly better in every way. It still echoes Shakespeare ; we hear about " the dreadful secret of a father's murder " ; the play's comic relief is quite comically close to its excellent original :

MORANZONE. Who is accused of having killed him ?
SECOND CITIZEN. Why, the prisoner, sir.
MORANZONE. But who is the prisoner ?
SECOND CITIZEN. Why, he that is accused of the Duke's murder.
MORANZONE. I mean, what is his name ?
SECOND CITIZEN. Faith, the same which his godfathers gave him. . . .

and so on, eight years together, dinners and suppers and sleeping hours excepted. Guido, when he says to the Duchess—

Everything is dead—
Save one thing only, which shall die to-night,

shows a true appreciation of one of the most admirable of dramatic utterances, "Those that are married already, all but one, shall live." For the rest, *The Duchess of Padua* is sufficiently Wilde's. Its culminating scene is on the palace stairway, up which young Guido creeps to avenge his father's murder on the cruel Duke who sleeps with Beatrice beyond the curtain at the stairway's head. Before he reaches it, out from the curtain slips the Duchess with a bloody dagger in her hand; for love of him, she herself has done the deed. Seeing it done, he recoils from her; and seeing him recoil from her and her deed of love, she recoils in her turn and denounces her lover as the murderer to the palace guard. That is the tableau on which the third act ends. The final tableau is also typically Wilde's. Guido is in prison, awaiting the hangman's coming. To him comes Beatrice, and drinks the poison provided for Guido by a kindly gaoler. They live in love together for the few moments while the poison does its work—a poignant situation that M. Loti has made good use of in a later drama. She dies, and Guido kills himself with her dagger. "As he falls across her knees," we read, "he clutches at the cloak which is on the back of the chair, and throws it entirely over her. There is a little pause. Then down the passage comes the tramp of soldiers. . . ." Thus early, we see Wilde's visual faculty at work. The very picture of the stage is

a design. The play is nothing more, a beautiful design ; when the Duchess says :

> Sit down here,
> A little lower than me ; yes, just so, sweet,
> That I may run my fingers through your hair,
> And see your face turn upwards like a flower
> To meet my kiss ;

the same kind of pleasure is ours as when Cecily puts her fingers through her dear boy's hair and hopes that it curls naturally. The best of Wilde's work is one in spirit ; and so it is on the whole with reassurance that we find in *Vera* a Prince Paul Maraloffski who is nothing but an early Illingworth, and hear in this play of sixteenth-century Padua, as we might hear in any one of the comedies of the drawing-room, that it is only very ugly or very beautiful women who ever hide their faces.

As for action, it is in Wilde's drama never other than a pattern. Each of the plays in this group is, not less but rather more than each of the modern plays, an " essay on decorative art." *Salomé* is a recurring pattern. When ten years pass and we come to this play, we find it to be a variation on the same theme of double recoil as that on which the loves of Guido and Beatrice were a decoration. The daughter of Herodias is amorous of the body of Iokanaan the prophet, and, when he scorns her, her amorousness turns to a hatred that is only medicable by the gift of the prophet's severed head.

The Tetrach is amorous of Salomé, and when he turns on the steps of the palace and sees Salomé illumined by the sudden moonlight he orders her to be crushed beneath the shields of the captains. But *Salomé* is master work, where the earlier plays were the work of an apprentice. The earlier plays were over-opulent; *Salomé* is the triumph of selection. *Salomé* is written in French that is not idiomatic but is suitable; it has been rendered into Wilde's English excellently by another hand. In *Salomé* all Wilde's characteristic abilities as a dramatist find their most concentrated and effective expression. Here the art of preparation issues in the creation of apprehensiveness—always the largest part in the success of tragic drama, viewed upon its technical side. Here verbal repetition is used directly for the evocation of an atmosphere of foreboding. The talk about the moon, the talk about to-night's strange beauty of the princess, achieve their effect absolutely. The dialogue is full of an extraordinary insistence, beat upon beat, the rhythmic blows of the worker in some strange metal who is unerring in his art. "Laisse-moi baiser ta bouche, Iokanaan." The body of the Young Syrian falls dead between them. "Princesse, le jeune capitaine vient de se tuer. . . ."

SALOMÉ. Laisse-moi baiser ta bouche, Iokanaan.

. . . . .

Je baiserai ta bouche, Iokanaan, je baiserai ta bouche.

Unremittingly, the blows go on. The Pharisees and the Sadducees dispute about angels; Tigellinus holds the Stoics who kill themselves to be ridiculous people, he himself regards them as being perfectly ridiculous; Herodias thinks that her husband is ridiculous with his talk of the moon, which is like the moon, that is all; the voice of the invisible prophet comes again and again; Herod looks all the while at Salomé with an extraordinary concentration—until the spell, become almost more than we can bear, is broken. "Je veux qu'on m'apporte présentement dans un bassin d'argent . . . la tête d'Iokanaan." Surprise is used here not to comic effect but for the heightening of this apprehensiveness; the soldiers have no sooner said that the Tetrach will not come to this place, for he never comes on the terrace, than he comes. *Salomé* may not have been worth doing, but it is useless to deny the astonishing mastery with which it is done. To Maeterlinck Wilde may have owed the instrument of verbal repetition, but not the ferocious effectiveness of its use; and it was not until many years later, and then to less effect, that Maeterlinck threw across the pattern of a play the voice of Him of whom the prophet Iokanaan was the forerunner. Wilde is much more reminiscent of Maeterlinck when he is writing easily and badly in the modern plays. "Love is easily killed," says Lady Windermere. "Oh! how

easily love is killed." Anyone could have written that; but no one but Wilde, not even Maeterlinck, could have written *Salomé*, even if he had wished to do so.

There remain the two fragments. The nearest of these to *Salomé* is *La Sainte Courtisane, or The Woman Covered with Jewels*, which is written in English, so far as it is written at all. Characteristically, the decoration is there before the theme; the woman is covered with jewels before she is created woman. But it is easy to see that Myrrhina the courtesan who comes to the desert, hearing of the beautiful young hermit, him who will not look on the face of woman, and coveting his love, was destined in the completed play to gain not love but Christianity, while Honorius the hermit, losing what he gave, went back to Alexandria to live the life of pleasure from which Myrrhina had come. We have not all that; but what we have is the atmosphere of expectation created by the talk of two desert-dwellers, and by the words of the woman, calculated as surely as the words of Salomé, "How strangely he spake to me, and with what scorn did he regard me. I wonder why he spake to me so strangely." We have speeches and portions of speeches, filled with the names of jewels and the names of perfumes and the names of fruits; names which decorate over-heavily the *Poems in Prose*, but are here decorations upon

speeches nerved undeniably with drama. And then abruptly we have the fragment's end :

> Come with me, Honorius, and I will clothe you in a tunic of silk. I will smear your body with myrrh and put spikenard on your hair. I will clothe you in hyacinth and put honey in your mouth. Love——
>
> HONORIUS. There is no love but the love of God.

With the antithesis, sharp as strophe and antistrophe, in our ears, we may go back to the " How hard good women are ! How weak bad women are ! " of Lady Windermere's drawing-room. Or forward to the end of *A Florentine Tragedy* :

> BIANCA. Why
> Did you not tell me you were so strong ?
> SIMONE. Why
> Did you not tell me you were beautiful ?

These are husband and wife. It was like Wilde to provide this fragment not with a beginning, but with an end—the end in which he was interested. Another hand has since provided very cleverly the necessary beginning, between wife and would-be lover, so that the play is a practicable play for the stage. Wilde's interest is in the entry of the husband, his slow crafty speeches about the beautiful stuffs it is his trade to sell, the fight in the half-darkness after Bianca has put out the torch, her sharp whisper " Kill him ! Kill him ! " to her lover; followed ever so suddenly by the double change when the young noble is dead, and husband and wife raise their eyes to one another

with new wonder. It is, as Wilde left it, an interesting fragment, not innocent of echoing now the "Merchant of Venice" and now "Othello," but in its sheer dramatic intensity far less near to his earlier play in verse than to *Salomé*. Three other similar plays he invented, *Ahab and Isabel*, *Pharaoh* and *The Cardinal of Arragon*, but did not write down. We learn of them from his literary executor, who adds, "*Pharaoh* was intensely dramatic and perhaps more original than any of the group." With *Salomé* and the two fragments of plays before us, altogether apart from *The Importance of Being Earnest*, it is impossible not to believe that Wilde would have gone on adding to his own peculiar mastery in the theatre.

Somewhere in his *Truth of Masks* Wilde gives some examples of the employment of costume "as a mode of intensifying dramatic situation"—that he should do so is evidence of what we have meant by the single spirit informing his work. But the principal concern of all his drama is the employment of *words* to the same purpose. Sometimes they are the mere "tinsel phrases" which Bianca, in Mr. Sturge Moore's clever prelude to the tragedy, protests have no power to move her at all; at other times we may say of Wilde's diction for the theatre, as Simone said of his Lucca damask, "Is it not soft as water, strong as steel?" His prose, of course, is better than his verse. At all times Wilde's insistence upon the supremacy of words

in a theatre which had forgotten how to use them was of the highest possible importance to the theatre. That his understanding of the needs of the theatre did not stop short at giving it good words we have seen; that he saw the theatre as a single art, in need above all of a unifying imagination, is clear from the following:

> As a rule, the hero is smothered in bric-à-brac and palm-trees, lost in the gilded abyss of Louis Quatorze furniture, or reduced to a mere midge in the midst of marqueterie; whereas the background should always be kept as a background, and colour subordinated to effect. This, of course, can only be done when there is one single mind directing the whole production. . . .

Wilde was thus the first to foreshadow the function of our present-day Producer. He began "to quarrel generally with most modern scene-painting." It is as an influence on the art of the theatre, the influence of an artist respecting the domain on which he entered, that he will find his true importance. His own work for the theatre has not always an equal value. He conceded much; when he conceded too much he lost interest, as in his men and women of the drawing-room who use the phrases of conventional theatrical emotion and who bury their faces in their hands. So far from omitting the Expected, he achieved it, at these times, like a fatality. It must be noted that the best of his plays, his comedy of youth on the one hand and his tragedy of an antique corruption

on the other, set up their conventions, which are quite perfect; while the "great" scenes of his emotional drama are conducted entirely by means of the "soliloquy" and the "aside," in the most disappointingly conventional manner. When Wilde is not interested he is careless; when he is careless, he loses style. He is always least the stylist when he is least sincere.

The nearest perhaps that we shall come to understanding Wilde's sincerity, the nearest certainly that, for our present purposes, we need come, is to point to that theme which we have seen to run through several of his plays, as it runs through *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* also—the theme that when you convert some one to an idea, you lose your faith in it. And what is this but a pattern? The inevitability of *Salomé* is not the inevitability which takes its rise in character. It may or may not be a very dangerous thing to tell the name of one's god. It might or might not happen that strength would call up love, and love make beauty visible. We do not know these things to be true of the saint and the courtesan, the husband and wife of Florence; we accept them for what they are, the rhythmic basis of a pattern. The drama to Wilde, as the intellect to Lord Illingworth, is an instrument on which one plays, that is all. If one plays with genuine enjoyment, that, we may say, is sincerity. Wilde came as near to the truth about his own art as we are likely to come, in the

course of that little essay on London models for a magazine, in which he spoke of the self-conscious artist and his small corner of life ; " but this very isolation leads often," he said, " to mere mannerism in the painter, and robs him of that broad acceptance of the general facts of life which is the very essence of art." Wilde, in his own small corner, did not fail to put into a comedy that is all his own a ready responsiveness to the surface beauties and absurdities of organized humanity, an innocent responsiveness and irresponsibility that have something childlike and delightful. He achieved an intensity of vision which, it is true, is of the essence of the art of drama ; but in achieving it he spoiled himself for that without which the greatest work may not be done in the drama or any other art—a broad acceptance of the general facts of life.

IV

J. M. BARRIE

BETWEEN Wilde and Mr. Bernard Shaw in the dramatic pantheon, between the drama which is decoration and the drama which is dialectics, is the place of J. M. Barrie—Sir James Barrie, "for his services." A reaction from the one as they have proved a corrective to the other, his services in the English theatre are yet most notable, as the services of Wilde and Mr. Shaw are most notable, for the fact that they have constituted a raid on the stronghold of the theatre men. The remarkable fact about Barrie is that he alone among English men of letters in a century was able to enter the English theatre, and to find an immediate and lasting welcome there. To English men of letters the theatre was, it began to appear, the Never, Never Land; and there is no one who does not remember that the only people who went there were the little boys who had fallen out of their prams. When Shelley, Dickens, Browning, Tennyson, Meredith, Stevenson and Henley, and Mr.

Henry James fell into the English theatre out of what the English theatre felt to be their proper perambulators, the English theatre hastened, like a dutiful nurse, to put them back again. It is probable that Wilde might have routed the kind nurse; but the fact remains that it was Barrie who slipped past her with the certainty, when he got into the theatre, of staying there. Our dramatist was clever; he did not announce, like Mr. Shaw, who was out of the perambulator soon after him, that he had come to sack the fortress. No, he accepted the theatre just as he found it, and sat down inside, and for ten years you would hardly have known it was his deep design to join in the game of keeping it open. And perhaps he has never quite joined in, but just sat there, securely inside, and happy in the knowledge that when he chose to give the theatre just the smallest excuse, however tiny, it would persist delightedly in keeping open, to show that it was glad of him. Happy, too, in this, that he was not born inside, like the theatre men, but had memories, glimpsed above the sides of his perambulator, of the real and living world. J. M. Barrie, man of the theatre, has not become merely one of the theatre's men, because, as we shall see, he has not lost his detachment.

But neither has he proved one of the lost boys in the English theatre. The real lost boys in the theatre are the men of letters who have made

entry there more for experiment than by vocation, and we cannot do better at the outset than be clear that J. M. Barrie is not one of these. When the novelist comes to the theatre he comes, too often, in the belief that here is a shorter but not different task, a kind of subdivision of his accustomed labour, a pleasing arrangement by which he is to supply the story and dialogue, and the actors and producers and others are to supply all the rest. Seeing that he has not (unless he write plays so near in form to the novel as those of Mr. Bernard Shaw) to write down how or with what accompaniments his people speak, but merely what they speak, he is wont to make a novel audibly vocal, as it were, and to ride off on the easiness of the theatre. When he has ridden off, however, we are left perfectly conscious that, sufficiently entertaining or delightful as his story for the theatre may have been, it has still been a story told not so much *by* the theatre as *in* the theatre. It is not the completely effective and characteristic and satisfying deliverance, that is to say, of which each of the arts is capable. To Browning, the dramatic principle was in a work which consisted of "so many utterances of so many imaginary persons, not mine"; but we may suppose that if the English theatre of his day had not quite disgusted that great dramatist, he would have gone on to demonstrate beyond doubt that the dramatic principle is something more than this. With

Tennyson, who rode off on the apology superior—"although not intended in its present form to meet the exigencies of our modern theatre," etc.—we need not linger: Tennyson, in the theatre, was just the lost boy. We shall do well to come at once to the case of Mr. Henry James. Mr. Henry James, the novel's complete master, has wooed the theatre for long, and has yet written for it, to speak generally, dialogue that does not bear its own burden. He has, in the theatre, been unable to put everything necessary to complete revelation into his people's mouths. The "aside," perfectly good part as it is of the poetic convention, is yet, if employed in modern drama, a confession of failure from full mastery. To the curious in these things it may be pointed out that the content of the old "aside" has gone into the new directions to the actor; for example, "I am determined to know what he thinks," spoken by a stage person to the audience in the breath before he speaks to his *vis-à-vis*, while rendering in one way an unvoiced thought which it is the novelist's simple business to take account of, would, in the hands of the modern dramatist, take some such form as (*with determination*), preluding an added subtlety in the spoken words. To take, if we may for a moment, a more complete instance from the work of Mr. Henry James:

"(*To herself*) Why does she speak to me? I don't like her, nor want to know her. (*Aloud*) Thank you, I'm better. I'm going out."

—that tells us, in a way, everything it is needful we should know; but it is a close approximation to the novelist's way, it is not the dramatist's way. The fact that the expression of character or intended action might have been put into the direct speech itself, or into a stroke of the stage that is apart from speech, is but an indication that everything, somehow or other, might have gone into the scene's unity, instead of left half hanging out like this. It is, of course, an objective test of excellence. There are no conventions which are good or bad, but only art which is good or bad—good, and better, and best. The best art, all other things being equal, is that which comes to us with the minimum of interference. The dramatist's way, in matters of this kind, is the better way, not for any abstract reason, nor for any empty technical satisfaction of those who fancy that technique is itself an end, but merely because the full content of the drama's moment makes more ready entrance of our imagination when shaped thus fitly in accordance with the theatre's plan. It is by this ability instinctively, as it were, to shape the scene's unity that one would most willingly test the dramatist; and it is a test that the novelist in the theatre, however easy or delightful his dialogue, however searching his wit, however profound his criticism of life, sometimes fails to go through. Mr. Arnold Bennett, for a latter-day example, we have seen

compose for the theatre in novel time; so that his plays, we would say, because they are conceived in terms of the novel, never gather the dramatic momentum—no moment in them appears to be the heir of all the others. But Barrie does not, in either of these ways, fail from full mastery. It would be impossible, if we wished, to regard him as belonging to the genus novelist in the theatre; for, when he came to enter it, he found himself to be perfectly at home.

There is no part of the theatre's art which is more frequently forgone by the novelist in the theatre than what we may speak of as its visual possibilities—the things that are apart from speech, either subserving its effectiveness or possessing, entirely on their own account, an effectiveness of mere physical disposition; and there is no part of the theatre's art which, by Barrie, is more surely seized. The novelist in the theatre will place the whole burden upon dialogue, a burden that dialogue cannot bear; the dramatist is able so to dispose his materials that a movement or circumstance may be more informing, a silence more eloquent. Who else of the theatre's workers has conceived a "silent part" so intimately exciting as that of Miss Tinker Bell in the Christmas play?

Now there is a kind of wit of situation which is not the verbal wit which arises out of events so disposed, but is the actual joyful perfection of

the disposed spectacle—as in the appearance of the mourning Ernest at the garden door in the comedy of Wilde. There is not a great deal of verbal wit in the comedies of J. M. Barrie, but there is a very great deal of what we have called the wit of situation. This dramatist, we feel, finding himself at large among the theatre's possibilities, made up his mind to have a very good time with all of them; but his love for them is not the amateur's love, like Stevenson's, nor the undiscriminating revelry of Mr. Bernard Shaw, who, when he broke into the theatre, left his faculty of detachment outside. Stevenson, fresh from the nursery excitements of a theatre in plain and coloured cardboard, never could conceal his joy in a "practicable window," and all the romantic machinery of the stage; but Stevenson did once strike out a scene that is a perfect example of the wit of situation. The scene is that in which he made blind Pew face the sleep-walking Admiral and take him for a seeing man in a dark room until he himself, groping with his hand to find the door, burned it in the flame of the candle. That is a scene which was tremendously exciting without a word spoken, and we may imagine that it is a scene which Barrie would like very much to have devised. But one such scene does not make a play, and that is why Barrie is a dramatist while Stevenson was, for the most part, a novelist enjoying himself in the theatre. Barrie has done

scenes nearly as good as that—the creeping back of all the persons to the smell of the butler's pot at the end of the second act of *The Admirable Crichton*, for example ; but they have been scenes in comedies that from first to last have been neatly and delightfully executed. The danger of a too great reliance upon spectacular exhibition is best illustrated to-day, perhaps, in the plays of Mr. Charles McEvoy, who exhausts himself by throwing something very remarkable upon the stage to which the play that follows is but anticlimax, in so far as it can be called a play at all. Spectacular exhibition for its own sake is never wit of situation, for this is achieved only when the most economical and delightful means are hit upon for the play's total illumination.

That Barrie is all awake to what we have termed the theatre's visual possibilities we have only to remember one of half a dozen traits to be confident ; his love, for example, of differing levels is very much his own. There are the cradles on the wall in *Little Mary*, the spiral staircase in *What Every Women Knows*, in *Old Friends* the stairs down which the white figure of Carry creeps—things that sometimes are nice on their own account, sometimes valuable to the dramatic purpose ; and then in *Peter Pan*, where all these things that the dramatist thinks nice, and we think nice too, have their apotheosis, there is the spectacle of the redskins camped above, and below, the home under the ground.

In the first of the plays which call here for our serious regard we shall not be surprised to find that Barrie is telling over again the story of Sir Arthur Pinero's "Profligate"; but he tells it neither in the manner of the novelist nor of the novelettist in the theatre. There are many things in *The Wedding Guest* that are quite truly Barrie's: the rising of the curtain on the jolly little rehearsal of how to be married, with the assistance of Meikle the butler; the game of draughts with the minister, in the fourth act, in which again the butler plays a part; but while these are incidentals of character, the principal point in the story's telling is also Barrie's own. There is the bowl of wedding rice, it will be remembered, that has been left, quite unobtrusively and naturally, to stand in the drawing-room. Margaret, when things are bad, she having denounced her husband for a profligate and returned to her father's home, listlessly dips her hand into this and lets the rice fall through her fingers. And later, at the very end, when the last word is spoken, and still we do not know just how the play is leaving us, the second woman, half cynically yet with a generous impulse, takes up two handfuls of the rice and flings them after the reconciled pair through the window, in token of their happiness, and hers. That is enough, without any tedious speeches of termination; it is the way of the good dramatist. And, for a slighter thing, there is the very good

moment in the comedy of equality, when the returned voyagers are once more in the drawing-room, and Ernest perpetrates his first epigram at the instant that Crichton, a butler again, happens to have his hand on the ship's bucket where it stands for exhibition of the travellers' prowess. Ernest's look of apprehension over his shoulder is all that we need for our recollection to become lively of what the penalty for epigrams was on the island. Ernest's look is all that we are given, and the moment is a delightful one, quite innocent of the insistence with which a less good dramatist would have spoiled it. Indeed, we may say at once that Barrie's workmanship is never anything else but neat and delightful.

The Hon. Ernest Woolley has this particular importance in the comedy of J. M. Barrie, that he is the symbol of its reaction from the drama of verbal decoration which, in its superficial aspect, was Wilde's. Wilde's drama was something more, but it was sufficiently that to make discipleship dangerous ; and from a long course of discipleship to the drama of verbal decoration Barrie has saved us more than any man. Thus, it is very good satire that no one in the household should understand Ernest's best paradox, and that at last the suggestion should be forthcoming that, of course, what he intended to say was the opposite. But if Barrie has preserved the English theatre from one kind of decadence, he has done his best also to

shake it out of the decadence in which he found it so self-satisfied. When he has told the theatre's stories, as in the play about a profligate, he has told them better. *Quality Street* is a more self-respecting supply to meet the dramatic demand than "Sweet Lavender." And in place of the little pieces about Hester's baby or an organist who took the pledge that were held "good enough" to raise a curtain, a quite definite drama in the one-act form has come from J. M. Barrie.

But when he has told the theatre's stories with a twist, he has, one feels, been the more Barrie. Nothing could be better satire of the theatre which is for ever given up to the pursuit of some matrimonial intrigue than the play which, for two acts itself a play of matrimonial intrigue, has for its final curtain warning an "especially loud click." How many constant playgoers, Amy Greys every one of them, sat through *Alice-Sit-by-the-Fire* in the belief that it was the real article, rather better done; until that final fall of the curtain shocked them, perhaps, into a reconsideration of the dramatic values on their way home? The only objection that could be brought against *Alice-Sit-by-the-Fire* is that, for a play that ends in a joke, it is beaten a little long and thin; really, the only terms upon which the second act is wholly entertaining would be that the play actually was the play of matrimonial intrigue for which the Amy Greys were taking it. For this reason we may

fancy the satire against the theatre of the theatre men more directly acceptable in the little one-act *Slice of Life*, in which the heroine, for lack of the raisonneur that is denied to a drama become self-consciously realistic, confides the facts of her birth and parentage into the telephone, and, having thrown away what Mr. Henry Arthur Jones once termed "that piercing spyglass" the soliloquy, has recourse to the sympathetic ear of a china dog lifted down from the mantelpiece.

Barrie's theatre, then, is a place that is much too good to be stupid in, and much too good to be stupid-clever in—it is, like the House They Built for Wendy, so good just to be *in*. In such a jolly place, with so many jolly things to be done, the last thing one would wish to indulge in is the drama of dialectics—the rhetorical dialectics of the Actor-Manager on the one hand, or the cut-and-come-again dialectics of Mr. Bernard Shaw on the other. As for fireworks, when one may have them green and red and yellow and white, like the fairies in the House in the Trees, who would have them verbal ?

With the drama too, which has, we would say, put the conviction of reality in the place of effectiveness of construction and given the lie direct to the strategy and tactics of the military men, the drama of J. M. Barrie has nothing to do. *The Twelve-Pound Look* would never have happened ; Kate would have been put out of the house by the two

lackeys of the irate little Knight long before his new wife had opportunity to find the look infectious. But for the dramatist's wholly delightful purposes, for Sir Harry Sims to echo Molière's bourgeois gentleman—"Ho, my two lackeys!"—would not do at all. A half-hour's traffic of the stage is the end in view, and, granting this, we may be sure that the sum of it will be neat and quick and beautifully rounded. Above all, the theatre will be *used* —we shall smile at the rehearsal of Sir Harry's "very beautiful ceremony," we shall be left in surprised admiration by the curtain's artfully considered fall. If the play is by Barrie, the theatre will be used, and used well; but we shall not forget it is the theatre. His is not the art that conceals art, and why should it?—we have not had so much art in the theatre for a century, that we may grieve now that it is displayed with a little delighted consciousness. *Rosalind*, the story of an actress who was both herself and her mother, the one in public life and the other in private, might be a truer play if she were not both within a stage ten minutes; but who are we that we should deny to ourselves, or to the author, the wholesome pleasure in the *tour de force*? The comedy of J. M. Barrie is an artificial comedy that is disarmingly natural, that is all.

Allied to this frank and engaging unreality of time and place is a care for character that is always the care of the proud parent for his children, rather

than the fine careless care (if one may say so) that gives to each person his or her strong life, and leaves them there to stand on their own feet. They are true people, these figures of the Barrie comedy, true because their author loves them; Mr. Crichton, Meikle, Mr. and Mrs. Darling, John Napoleon and Michael and Cosmo and Amy, Colonel and Mrs. Grey, Nurse and Nana, the cricketing clergyman, the Wylies, the Hon. Ernest, Mr. Fairbairn and the Earl of Loam, and all the line of "little mothers"—Jenny Geddes and Moira and Wendy and Richardson and Maggie Shand; but when their author does not love them, rather a serious thing happens. It happens to Lady Sybil Lazenby, who has the temerity in the Parliamentary comedy to come between the little mother and her child, John Shand. It is what happens to Ricky Ticky Tavy in the play by Mr. Shaw; but there it shocks one less, because you cannot play the game of ninepins without a ninepin or two going down into the dirt. But Barrie's is not the comedy of ninepins, and we are sorry for Lady Sybil Lazenby. She is so heartlessly bowled over, in order that the firm stand of Maggie may shine more admirable. It is likely that you cannot be quite completely fair to all your persons unless you are at least as fair to them as Life is—that is to say, unless you grant to them the right to stand on their own feet; and this the comedy of Barrie scarcely does. The very neatness of design in

which this comedy never disappoints us is the negation of its persons' right to step outside. But from the really strongest comedy, which of the persons may not surprisingly step out, and go walking, it seems, his own road through the world ?

If the comedy of Barrie is not the really strongest comedy, it is a comedy which is perfectly expressive and worthy of the contemporary theatre, and a comedy of which one example at least—*The Admirable Crichton*—is quite certain to be keeping its theatre open in a hundred years. Of how many plays of our generation are we able with an equal confidence to say that ? In rendering our statement of account between J. M. Barrie and the theatre of his day, we may find it to be over-simplified, but we shall not find it to be false. " No," wrote Stevenson, late in his life, " I will not write a play for Irving, nor for the devil. Can you not see that the work of *falsification* which a play demands is of all tasks the most ungrateful ? " That was the apology petulant, from the artist who has failed of full success in a medium that was not his own. The theatre did not demand falsification from Stevenson : that was what he gave it. In going in memory back over the theatre of Barrie, there is much that is simplified, but nothing, one thinks, that is false.

Not to count the things that took their true origin in the printed page—*Walker, London*, and *The Little Minister*—there was that earliest

comedy of which, one has to confess, one remembers only a hayfield, a professor, a pretty secretary, and the Scottish tongue. There was the story of the wild oats the young man had sown, to find them thrusting their ears through the very seams of the floor—as Sir Arthur Pinero would say; but Sir Arthur Pinero, in writing this play, had written it differently. There was the "Uncomfortable Play," which, for all the humour of its incidentals, proved, like the satirical comedy we have glanced at, to be somewhat too thin-spread for the magnitude of the little joke when we came to it. And what of that other little joke, of what really happened to Adam, which constituted the sum of what is known to every woman and to this dramatist, but not to any other man at all? Well, there is this to be said, that when the little joke was retrenched in representation, at a later appearance of the comedy, the comedy was found to be a good and, in essentials, a true comedy without it; and that is more than can be said of the kind of play which is less to its author than the epigram which brings down its curtain. There have been effects of dramatic contrast (such as that between Maggie and Lady Sybil) which have shared with effects of dramatic irony (such as that a serene sky should shine down upon the sad little daughter of the man who conquered his drunkenness too late) a simplification resulting almost in naïveté. Together with the

things to which we have not quite given our credence, but which have not mattered at all (such as the time-plot of the one-act plays), there have been things to which we have not quite given our credence either, and which have mattered more (such as the symptoms under catalepsy of the wedding-guest). *The Wedding Guest's* solvent, too, may seem to us in the circumstances to have been over-simplified; but since it is really the solvent of all the plays—what the gentle pirate Smee desiderated as a Mother's Love—it is nice to think we need not name it false.

Simplification, one fancies, may be left to stand on the one side of the account, as it must certainly stand on the other. The success of J. M. Barrie in the theatre is the success of simplification. Says Jenny Geddes, aged eleven, of the baby that was the profligate's, "Sometimes she sleeps and sometimes she wakes up—I never see such a baby!" But we have, in the world outside, seen just such a baby more than once, and our pleasure is the pleasure of recognition. The theatre of J. M. Barrie is full of such pleasure. In *Peter Pan* we recognize our nursery; children don't, they would be bored if they did—that is the art of the thing. In the "fantasy" about a desert island, we recognize something that we know to be so simple and profoundly true that from any other than Barrie we should, as the children their nursery, refuse to receive it. In *Pantaloon* we even

recognize the ancient family in mufti, and know that in mufti they would be just like that, with Harlequin and Columbine, of course, quite speechless, and a sausage-shop over the way. It is a delightful power, this power to convince us that our interests and observations are identical. Says Jenny Geddes, aged eleven, to the baby that was the profligate's, " This is a chair, and that there's the window, and the thing outside the window is the world." The thing outside the window, in the theatre of Sir James Barrie, really is the world, and that is a great deal to be thankful for. The theatre of the theatre men had the world outside, no doubt, but its only window had the misfortune to be merely a " practicable " window, which is as much as to say it was quite windowless.

V

BERNARD SHAW

MR. BERNARD SHAW confronts his age not so much a dramatist as a writer possessed of a philosophy and of a trick of the stage, who has employed the one to expound the other. He has said so himself on more than one occasion. At the outset of his career as a dramatist he defined the impulse which moved him as the "philosopher's impatience to get to realities," and he went on to state, "I fight the theatre, not with pamphlets and sermons and treatises, but with plays." Now the dramatist by vocation does not fight the theatre at all. It is always a pity for the artist to quarrel with his medium, for if the artist wins, he will despise the medium, and if the medium wins, he will still despise it. The most curious thing about Mr. Bernard Shaw is that as long as he wrote about the theatre he always called it a church, with reverence, but the moment he began to practise regularly in it he treated it as though it really were a church—that is to say, without reverence.

In making the theatre the vehicle for a philosophy of life, instead of for a load of banalities, it is true that by implication he has dignified it; but the philosopher has put all his emphasis upon the evolution of a better kind of life, and the playwright has done nothing in particular to assist in the evolution of a better kind of theatre. "I tell you," says Don Juan in *Man and Superman*, "that as long as I can conceive something better than myself I cannot be easy unless I am striving to bring it into existence or clearing the way for it." But Mr. Bernard Shaw's attitude towards the theatre has not so much been one of striving and clarifying as of a rather scornful acceptance of the "hackneyed stage framework" of the theatre as he found it. "I have always cast my plays," he has left it on record in one of his prefaces, "in the ordinary practical comedy form in use at all theatres; and far from taking an unsympathetic view of the popular preference for fun, fashionable dresses, a little music, and even an exhibition of eating and drinking by people with an expensive air, attended by an if-possible-comic waiter, I was more than willing to show that the drama can humanize these things as easily as they, in undramatic hands, can dehumanize the drama." Mr. Shaw has gone further: in another preface he has stated quite explicitly his belief that "It is the philosophy, the outlook on life, that changes, not the craft of the play-

wright." We may well make this antinomy between the philosopher and the playwright the starting-point of our examination.

In the first place we shall find that Mr. Shaw's best plays are the plays that carry, not necessarily the least of his philosophy, but that carry it most successfully. What are Mr. Shaw's plays? Well, they are twenty-three in number, and they comprise an "anti-romantic comedy," a "topical comedy," a plain "comedy," "a comedy and a philosophy," a "trifle," a "mystery," two "melodramas," a "stage play in blank verse," an "adventure," a "history," a "tragedy," a "discussion," a "conversation," a "debate," a "study," and three "plays," together with five compositions which, since their resourceful author has not been able to name them, we must include in the category mentioned by Sir James Barrie's heroine as darling little sillies that just don't know what they are. In his twenty-three plays (up to the present), Mr. Shaw has surveyed mankind from the Balkans to the Far West, he has associated on familiar terms with Napoleon after Lodi, with Burgoyne before Saratoga, with Cæsar in Egypt, with Shakespeare at Hampton Court, and he has personally conducted a party of tourists from Richmond to Hell. And yet Mr. Shaw has done nothing in particular to extend the confines of the English drama. Wherever he has been, he has not been unmindful of the "popular preference" for a word or two

about the English; so that Cæsar has a British Islander for a secretary, Napoleon explains the English to us, General Burgoyne is satiric at the expense of the War Office, Major Petkoff learns of the new habit of washing from an Englishman at Philippopolis, and England is publicly commended by the Devil as the country in which he has the largest following. At once a link with Shakespeare who, in setting a tragedy in the island of Cyprus, would not suffer the occasion to go by without informing the English that they were great drinkers. Nor is it the only link; for Mr. Shaw, in taking over the ordinary stage framework that was "practical," took over the form that, poorly used as it was by some of his immediate predecessors, had yet been good enough for the best English dramatists from Shakespeare to Wilde to put their plays in. Shakespeare, amongst his lesser lapses, falls occasionally into a fault in comic writing which we may call the verbal anticlimax. Here is an instance of it:

MARIA. Marry, sir, sometimes he is a kind of Puritan.

SIR ANDREW. O! if I thought that, I 'd beat him like a dog.

SIR TOBY. *What, for being a Puritan?*

This is a fault in dramatic writing only because, in the theatre, we laugh at the second line, and have no need of the third; indeed, we never hear it because of the laughter. It is thus a fault in dramatic economy; and it is a fault also, of a

graver kind, because it proceeds from an under-estimation of the audience's intelligence. The best comic writing is always keying our intelligence up ; it gives us great credit ; poorer comic writing has often this air of descending to our level, and making everything even and acceptable for us. Now we shall find that Mr. Shaw is often guilty of this fault of under-estimating his audience. We may take at random an instance from one of his best plays ; the Swiss soldier of fortune is describing to the romantic young lady a cavalry charge as it really is :

RAINA. Yes, first One !—the bravest of the brave !
MAN. Hm ! You should see the poor devil pulling at his horse.
RAINA. *Why should he pull at his horse ?*
MAN. *It's running away with him, of course : do you suppose the fellow wants to get there before the others and be killed ?*

We have laughed at the second line, and we do not laugh again at the fourth ; but that is not merely the waste of two lines ; it is the achievement of verbal anticlimax, and it is in the nature of anticlimax to be retrospective in its influence. It will be enough to establish kinship, on this lower plane, with both Shakespeare and Wilde, if we note in passing Mr. Shaw's unfailing pleasure in the confusion of a name ; it amuses him as much that Mr. Redbrook should be addressed as Mr. Kidbrook or Ftatateeta as Teetatota as it

amused Wilde to name a Member of Parliament Kelvil in order to call him Kettle, or as it amused Shakespeare to give a fellow the name of Elbow and then to make puns upon it. If Mr. Shaw has a person who is a professor of Greek, he cannot resist the humour of addressing him as "Euripides"; but we shall have other occasions in the course of this chapter to note the undergraduate quality that is sometimes apparent in Mr. Shaw's humour.

The best plays of Mr. Bernard Shaw are *Arms and the Man, You Never Can Tell, Candida, The Devil's Disciple, Captain Brassbound's Conversion,* and *The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet.*

Arms and the Man is a quite perfect comedy. How good a framework for comedy the "practical" stage framework was for a writer who came to the theatre with Mr. Shaw's intellectual vivacity may be seen in this, one of the earliest of his plays. Its opening is delightfully exciting; before the curtain is up two minutes we get our first surprise; nobody but a dramatist of the very first quality could have maintained so successfully the tension of that admirable first act. The second act is even better; there are moments in it that are triumphs of comic preparation. Who is there that does not cherish the recollection of the line, "Captain Bluntschli: I am very glad to see you; but you must leave this house at once," and of the subsequent dilemma of the Captain's carpet-bag? The third act is very nearly as good:

there is a very rich sort of drollery in the Captain's four thousand table-cloths; and it is beautiful to see how, the moment the imbroglio is completely untangled, the play is at an end. There is nothing that the author of *Arms and the Man* might not have done within the theatre's "ordinary framework." He proceeded to do something more in another almost perfect comedy, *You Never Can Tell*. This is less a comedy of situation and more a comedy of character: of the character of William the waiter. William is more than the if-possible-comic waiter: he is both comic and possible—a creation. The twins, too, are comic creations. Nor is the play without its very good surprise: "No, sir: the other bar—your profession, sir"; and its triumphs of comic preparation, as when Dolly echoes the K.C. and tells him he may think he is not going to bully her but he is, and when that unhappy phrase of Gloria's about the grass growing and the water running is brought home to the man in Madeira. Again, how beautifully the play ends! But now let us ask ourselves two questions. When *Arms and the Man* is played before us, are we conscious of anything remarkable in the simplification by which people of differing nationalities overcome the difficulty of communication? I do not think we are; the play carries us with it. When *You Never Can Tell* is played, are we conscious of the surprising simplification of circumstances by which the Clandon

family finds a father? I think we are, just a little; but not enough in this particular comedy to matter. Now let us turn to *Candida*. *Candida* is not comic—except by excrescence. *Candida* is a comedy of character. Candida herself is a picture of Everywoman, a very interesting and even beautiful picture; the clergyman, her husband, is a good, straight piece of characterization; the poet—well, he is Mr. Shaw's notion of a poet, and we are interested. There is a discussion in the last act which is a necessary discussion, and when the appropriation of Candida is made clear, the discussion is over and the play ends. It is a "well-made play." But what is involved in its conformity to type? Burgess; and all that stuff about everybody in the house being mad; and the scene of Prossy and Lexy drunk; and what are all these things but the time-honoured comic relief that we may find in a whole generation of Mr. Shaw's predecessors?

We have so far discovered nothing more for ourselves than Mr. Shaw, always anxious to be helpful, has himself discovered for us, although, to be sure, I do not think Mr. Shaw ever did himself the justice of admitting how good those early comedies of his were. In a quite recent preface, that to the latest edition of *Man and Superman*, Mr. Shaw says: "I have not been sparing of such lighter qualities as I could endow the book with for the sake of those who ask nothing

from a play but an agreeable pastime." And now, having secured that admission, and pausing only to note that while in *Man and Superman* Mr. Shaw's philosophy finds its fullest expression, the stage framework of that comedy is of the poorest (a contention we may proceed to illustrate in a moment), let us go back to *Candida.*

If Burgess is of no particular value as a likely father for Candida, there is one purpose at least that he serves, and that is to make (in the remarkable diction which he favours) the undoubtedly true remark, "Hopinions become vurry serious things when people takes to hactin' on 'em." It mattered very little that Mr. Shaw should profess a cynical carelessness with regard to stage forms as long as he proceeded to write quite admirable comedies within them; but as soon as he began to be careless in writing for the theatre, that was a pity. It will be remembered that the Rev. Mavor Morell's secretary, and all the Rev. Mavor Morell's secretaries, suffered from what Candida called Prossy's complaint. "She's in love with you, James: that's the reason. They're all in love with you. And you are in love with preaching because you do it so beautifully." Now it was just about the time Mr. Shaw wrote *Candida* that he began to suffer from G.B.S.'s complaint. It was not so much that he fell in love with preaching because he did it so beautifully, or that he began to "hact" on the "hopinion" he had held when

he was merely a harmless dramatic critic that the theatre is a church. No, Mr. Shaw has always been in love with preaching, and he had always preached beautifully. The trouble set in when Mr. Shaw no longer merely put up with the "hackneyed stage framework," but fell positively in love with it. The medium won. The artist fell in love with all the stage tricks because he did them so beautifully. For the line of least resistance is G.B.S.'s complaint. It is a complaint that has something in common with the desire of schoolboys to "show off." Mr. Shaw was by this time master of all the stage tricks, he was a better hand at them than any other man of his generation, and he liked them so much that he allowed them to master him. But before they mastered him he wrote two more plays that are almost completely free from G.B.S.'s complaint. *The Devil's Disciple* has an opening inferior only to that of *Arms and the Man*, the action is swift and logical to the end, the diabolonian Dick and the minister are consistently well-realized and at the same time contain much of Mr. Shaw's characteristic philosophy and foreshadow more. He called it a "melodrama," and we must insist upon regarding it with the most perfect seriousness as one of the best of Mr. Shaw's plays. He called *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* an "adventure," but the adventurousness in it is not so remarkable as the excellence of the characterization. Lady

Cecily, who says "Howdyedo" to rascals the world over and finds them quite nice, is the truest and most engaging portrait of a woman in Mr. Shaw's long gallery. His real hold on the theatre has never been better exemplified than in the little scene in which Lady Cecily outdoes Captain Brassbound while helping on his coat, for "all men look foolish when they are feeling for their sleeves." Felix Drinkwater, the hooligan, must for ever be memorable if only for his effort to lift himself out of the "sawdid reeyellities of the Worterleoo Rowd." The play is again well-shaped, although the circumstance by which, in the little seaport of Mogador, the eminent judge finds at once a nephew in Captain Brassbound, a former acquaintance in the hooligan, and his brother's early friend in the missionary, may be held to go as far in the direction of conventional simplification as even the "practical comedy form" does well to go. Much more might be forgiven to the play for its ending with Lady Cecily's words, "How glorious! how glorious! And what an escape!" —one of the best of Mr. Shaw's endings in the days before he allowed himself to "run on."

And now, if we wish to appreciate the ravages worked by G.B.S.'s complaint, we have only to turn from either of these plays to the play that immediately followed them. *Cæsar and Cleopatra* is very clever, very prolix, very "tricky," quite unactable in its entirety and, a surprising thing,

far too tiresome to be read. Everywhere over it is that destructive air of too great ease. A play about Julius Cæsar ?—Why, certainly, by this time Mr. Shaw could write you a play about anything. Custom had made it in him a property of easiness, as in the gravedigger who tossed up skulls. Mr. Shaw tossed up the skull of Cæsar, and knocked it gaily about the mazzard with his sexton's spade, under cover of an *ad hoc* historical discovery that Cæsar was even such a man as himself ; very much as, later on, he justified the clowning of the doctors with the proposition that " life does not cease to be funny when people die any more than it ceases to be serious when people laugh." *Cæsar and Cleopatra*, with its ill-considered rough-and-tumble varied with a superficial air of profound study, is easily the poorest of Mr. Shaw's plays. It was born a victim to G.B.S.'s complaint : that complaint which, when it is galloping, leaves us no recourse but to the remark Mr. Shaw's unknown Lady had to make to Napoleon, " W-w-w-w-wh ! do stop a moment ! " Let us look a little deeper into the symptoms.

The line of least resistance, in the theatre, leads the artist first of all into falseness to character. Perhaps, if the dramatic artist stood in any need of a motto, we might give him the words of Sir Thomas Browne : " Every man truly lives so long as he acts his nature, or some way makes good the faculties of himself " ; for every character in

drama truly lives on just the same terms. Since drama is rooted in character, and finds in action its expression and fulfilment, it is the business of the dramatist first to create character, and then to devise means by which it may act its nature. It is not the highest business of the dramatist to devise a situation, and then to invent such persons as may be necessary for its exploitation: that way lies our old friend the *pièce bien faite*. Nor is it the highest business of the dramatist to assemble his people and to hand to each of them one from a neat assortment of qualities that he may hang it like a charm about his neck: the outcome of that procedure is the play of "humours." Hazlitt spoke the last word upon the play of humours when he said of Ben Jonson that his plots were "improbable by an excess of consistency" and that his people were "extravagant tautologies of themselves." Now we have seen how the plots of even the best of Mr. Shaw's plays, plays like *You Never Can Tell* and *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*, are improbable by an excess of consistency; and are not his people too often extravagant tautologies of themselves? We may see the genesis of the type in the earliest of all the plays. Sartorius is an unprincipled money-grubber. When Lickcheese, his cast-off hireling, comes to him with a scheme that he says will put money into his pocket, Sartorius asks, quite against likelihood, "How much money," where-

upon Lickcheese remarks, "Ah! there you speak like yourself, Sartorius." Exactly: every man in his humour. Now see how Mr. Shaw's persons, as their author came to care less and less for character and more and more for exposition, degenerated steadily into types. Are not Cholly, with his "certain amount of tosh," and B.B., with his "stimulate the phagocytes," and Mr. Tarleton, with his "read Whatshisname," and General Mitchener, with his "shoot them down," increasingly after the Ben Jonson manner? The professor of Greek who can never open his mouth without quoting Euripides is in no way more subtly characterized than was our old friend of a hundred appearances who proved that he must be a professor by his habit of correcting proofs in the drawing-room. The line of least resistance has led Mr. Shaw then, as to character, straight back into the comedy of humours. It has led him, as to composition, straight back into the *pièce bien faite*, with a difference; that is to say, not into the play of concentrated "situation," but into the play whose situations, such as they are, are varied with comic relief. Where may we find Mr. Shaw at his most serious? Well, he has named *The Doctor's Dilemma* a tragedy: let us try there. He has not been sparing of such tragic qualities as he could endow Dubedat with: for "the most tragic thing in the world is a man of genius who is not also a man of honour," and we are to believe

that the painter Dubedat is a man of genius. Mr. Shaw told us early of his own determination to accept "problem" as the only material of drama: the problem in which he seeks to interest us here is, supposing we had the choice between a good man and good pictures, which should we choose? He proceeds to kill Dubedat slowly quite close to the footlights with all the doctors clowning about him. Can "problem"—far more, can tragedy—live in such an atmosphere as that? Of course not, both are in a minute as dead as Dubedat, and the play drags on to an ending that we do not care about in the least. The easy way to write a tragedy is to arrange for some one in the course of an indiscriminate action to die. The hard way is to cause a person of such character to die, contending with a series of such circumstances, that the whole of life is somehow seen to be there on the stage at issue. It is quite true that life does not stop being funny (if that is the word for it) when the fatal knock comes on Macbeth's gate, or when Hamlet is in his agony, or when Lear is driven forth in the infirmity of his age: there are still porters and grave-diggers and fools in the world. But the point is that, in the hands of the dramatist, life does not have to stop *in order to be* funny. Its march is even, and the true dramatist's presentment of it carries with it his own sense of the comedy of things. It is Mr. Shaw's determination at all costs to stop and be

funny that has earned for him the name of *farceur ;* but in this quality, if examined more closely, he will be found to have much in common with the most conventional of his predecessors who were by predestination practitioners in comic relief. The only difference is that while they practised it in the mistaken belief that without its aid we could not possibly bear up under the strain of their tragic " situations," Mr. Shaw practises it merely because he can do it so beautifully.

Akin to this question of the supremacy of character in drama are all the other things in good craftsmanship that make up a general impression of reality. What do we mean, in this connexion, by reality ? When Mr. Shaw was in the first flush of his success as a dramatist who had waged war on the ordinary theatre, and before he proceeded to avail himself of the privilege of the conqueror by converting to his own use everything he found within the walls, he trumpeted a declaration entitled A Dramatic Realist to his Critics, which celebrated the fact that the hero of his anti-romantic comedy carried chocolate instead of cartridges in his cartridge-box. Mr. Shaw was possibly quite right in his fact ; but we mean an adherence to something more than facts when we speak of dramatic reality. Let us state again the antinomy with which we started. We may state it now in terms of the difference between the " impatience for realities " Mr. Shaw the

philosopher exhibits, and the contentment with unrealities he exhibits as a playwright. The dramatic realist, while simplifying character of necessity, would not carry simplification of character to the point to which we have seen Mr. Shaw carry it. This matter of simplification is important. The secret of Mr. Shaw's dramatic criticism was simplification—the public was always wrong. When Mr. Shaw turned from writing about plays to the vastly more difficult business of writing them, he still proceeded by a method of simplification. The best, as well as the worst, of Mr. Shaw's characters are achieved by a process of simplification — Lady Cecily and William the waiter, Broadbent and Straker, Captain Kearney and the Newspaper Man. The Shaw Girl, who might have for her motto the line from *The Admirable Bashville:*

> Two things I hate, my duty and my mother;

the Shaw Boy, whether as the poet in *Candida* or in successive reincarnations; the ruthless Man of Action, the man or woman with the soul of a servant, the youthful or elderly Aim or Butt, who may be of either sex—we have seen how all of these tend, when they fall below their best, to achieve the ultimate simplification in the mere "type." Allied to Mr. Shaw's simplification of character, which results in the type, is his simplification of humour, which results in mere

repetition. The Supposition Accurate, as when Burgess sarcastically supposes Eugene to be an earl and he proves to be the nephew of an earl, is a good form of surprise; but it is not so good when we find Mr. Gilbey sarcastically supposing Juggins to be the brother of a duke, and Juggins proving to be the brother of a duke. "See then, ye gods, the duke turn footman" is the Shavian comic formula, as well as Cashel Byron's. The Supposition Inaccurate is a form of surprise that may more safely stand the strain of Mr. Shaw's characteristic repetition, and it leads repeatedly to some of his happiest comic effects, as when the rigid McComas supposes William's son to be a potman when he is really a barrister, or when Tanner, priding himself on being alone in his congratulation of Violet upon her defiance of the marriage law, finds that she has not defied the marriage law, and on congratulating Hector Malone upon the same independence of character, finds that he has not defied the marriage law either. But Mr. Shaw's simplification of character is as nothing to his simplification of incident.

The modern theatre has no longer a belief in a unity of time and a unity of place, but it has fixed very clearly in their room what we may speak of as a *reality* of time and a *reality* of place. Nothing is of more usual occurrence in the "practical" theatre than the meal which takes only a minute; not because it would in reality take only a minute,

but because the dramatist simply has not taken the trouble to defer to reality. A small thing, it may be said, and so it is, but one of those small things that are not negligible; for who has not found his pleasure in something very much larger detracted from by just such a small piece of dramatic unreality? Mr. Shaw, in taking over the "practical" theatre's exhibitions of eating and drinking, took over the "practical" theatre's carelessness of the reality of time: the people in his plays are sometimes allowed the most absurdly short periods in which to take supper or to smoke a whole pipe. As for the reality of place, we have seen the obverse of that in the way in which the people who are necessary to the action of his plays most remarkably find themselves gathered together. Really, in this matter Mr. Shaw is quite cynical. It is necessary, for example, to Mr. Shaw's "tragedy" that all the doctors, picked men every one of them, should attend upon the penniless artist; and this is how Mr. Shaw takes care of the circumstance:

MRS. DUBEDAT. There! be good now: remember that the doctors are coming this morning. Isn't it extraordinarily kind of them, Louis, to insist on coming? All of them, to consult about you?

There is only one reply: It is, extraordinarily kind. Or it is, to put it in the way Mr. Shaw prefers to put it, "A dramatic coincidence!" And as for the reverse of the picture, we have that

whenever it is desirable that the people gathered together should be in some other place, whereupon, as in *Man and Superman*, they forthwith find themselves gathered together there. If Mr. Shaw were to write a play about Mahomet (as he probably will), it would trouble him just as little to bring the mountain to Mahomet as to bring Mahomet to the mountain.

It has been claimed for Mr. Shaw, by himself, that in two of his most recent plays " a return has been made to unity of time and place as observed in the ancient Greek drama." The claim does not amount to very much, for if the dramatist is at liberty to send all over the parish to fetch in the Mayoress and the beadle, to put the Mayoress off into a highly communicative trance, and to recruit the number of his persons by aeroplane if the conversation shows signs of flagging, it should not be difficult for him to make the action of his play continuous, particularly if his play has no action.

No, Mr. Shaw is not a dramatic realist. Reality does not lie at the end of the line of least resistance, as Mr. Shaw, in his capacity of philosopher, has written twenty-three plays to establish. The play which immediately followed *Cæsar and Cleopatra* was *Man and Superman*. Quite the best and most complete expression of Mr. Shaw's " philosophy " is to be found in *Man and Superman*, the " comedy " of which is a very easygoing affair. Its third act, in Hell, the " home of the

unreal," with Heaven, the "home of the masters of reality," just round the corner, is the Quintessence of Shavianism; but it has so little to do with the theatre that when the play is given there it is found necessary to omit it. *Man and Superman*, while the most characteristic product of Mr. Shaw's genius, is thus not one of the best of his plays, because it does not carry its burden. To put the case another way, its comic vision and its philosophic vision are not in alignment. The struggle between the Philosopher and the Playwright has been fearful, but the playwright has not won. It is perhaps their consciousness of this inability finally to express all that their author would have them express that drives Mr. Shaw's persons into *violence*—a highly simplified form of action. All the persons of Mr. Shaw's plays are violent—from Blanche Sartorius, who takes up the parlourmaid by the hair of her head, and from Julia Craven, who shakes the Philanderer and growls over him "like a tigress over her cub," down to Margaret Knox, whose very similar handling of her Bobby gives the Frenchman his idea that these English domestic interiors are very interesting. Mr. Shaw does not shrink from the exhibition of physical violence—for tragic effect, as when Bill bashes his fist into the face of the Salvation lassie; or for comic effect, as when we are asked to laugh very heartily at the spectacle of Felix Drinkwater carried out to be bathed. In

Candida the collar of the poet suffers violence at the hands of the clergyman, and in the little skit upon *Candida* both He and Her Husband end up on the floor. Even Mr. Shaw's use of stage-properties tends to be violent—as witness the book-cases at the Ibsen Club that are sent spinning by the huntress in pursuit of her prey, the dentist's chair that is let down with a bang in *You Never Can Tell*, or the aeroplane that falls with a smash into Mr. Tarleton's glass-houses. Mr. Shaw is fond of securing that crescendo of excitement which is so valuable at the fall of an intermediate curtain by starting the engine of a motor-car behind the scenes. That he is not incapable of the quietly effective opportunities the theatre offers we may see when the maid who has been shaken by Blanche is heard passing the library door of the Sartorius household "with a tray jingling," or when Her Husband announces his entry by tapping the barometer in the hall downstairs. These quiet things are good; but Mr. Shaw, we feel, prefers the noisier ones. Nor does Mr. Shaw's love of violence stop short at the physical. Here is one fragment of conversation between a lady and gentleman about to be married:

RAINA [*sarcastically*]. A shocking sacrifice, isn't it? Such beauty! Such intellect! Such modesty! wasted on a middle-aged servant man. Really, Sergius, you cannot stand by and allow such a thing. It would be unworthy of your chivalry.

SERGIUS [*losing all self-control*]. Viper ! Viper ! [*He rushes to and fro, raging.*]

BLUNTSCHLI. Look here, Saranoff : you're getting the worst of this.

And here is another :

TANNER. You lie, you vampire : you lie. . . . Infamous, abandoned woman ! Devil !

ANN. Boa-constrictor ! Elephant !

TANNER. Hypocrite !

ANN. I must be, for my future husband's sake.

TANNER. For mine ! [*correcting himself savagely*] I mean for his.

On this kind of evidence it has been claimed for Mr. Shaw, this time not by himself, that indignation is the passion that spins the Shavian plot. It has been urged that all his principal persons are gifted, like Mr. Cuthbertson in *The Philanderer*, with " an habitually indignant manner." But to say merely this is to miss a point of importance. Indignation may be a quite vital emotion, but the fact is that the persons of Mr. Shaw's drama are galvanized rather than vitalized. His own impulse to the drama may be indignation ; he has stated it thus : " To me the tragedy and comedy of life lie in the consequences, sometimes terrible, sometimes ludicrous, of our persistent attempts to found our institutions on the ideals suggested to our imaginations by our half-satisfied passions, instead of on a genuinely scientific natural history ":

a strictly intellectual indignation. This intellectual indignation finds its most highly simplified utterance in the exclamation of Tanner: "What a country! What a world!" It is in essence an indignation with men and women for their stupidity in being, what another dramatist without indignation said they were, merely players. The Devil finds life to be an "infinite comedy of illusion," and Mr. Shaw is intellectually indignant that his contemporaries should continue to side with the Devil. This intellectual indignation with make-believe issues most happily in scenes of comedy, such as the scene in the early play in which Raina, herself very indignant at the accusation that she has ever in her life told more than two lies, suddenly throws up the sponge and sinks to the ottoman with the surrendering sigh, "How did you find me out?" The most nearly tragically indignant of the plays is *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, and *Mrs. Warren's Profession* has so little genuine emotion as to be nothing but an essay in galvanism. In the second act Mrs. Warren is galvanized into expression of her views; and at the end of the third act, when the play is obviously flagging, an attempt is made to galvanize the whole thing into a semblance of vigour by the exciting suggestion that the love of Frank and Vivie is destined to tragedy because they are children of the same father. But the fourth act makes it clear that Frank and Vivie are not in love, and the highly indignant preface

explicitly states their possible consanguinity to be an "insoluble problem." The heroics with a gun at the fall of the third curtain are thus a piece of quite gratuitous violence. No one in this play is really indignant; they are puppets at the end of wires, and the wires are attached to a battery, and Mr. Shaw is in charge of the current. Nor are we made indignant by this scientific demonstration; only Mr. Shaw is indignant, and he has to take a preface for the purpose because his indignation is intellectual indignation. The measure of Mr. Shaw's inability as a writer of plays is to be found in the measure of his ability as a writer of prefaces; just as the measure of his necessity for stage directions is the measure of his failure in the creation of character.

But the concentrated intellectual indignation of which Tanner's remark was the expression would be productive of a series of such remarks rather than of plays as pleasant of those of Mr. Shaw, plays which result for the most part in that "general laughter and good humour" which characterized, we read, the indiscriminate gathering on the Sierra Nevada. The truth is that Mr. Shaw's philosophy issues cheerful as the religion of Major Barbara—the religion which she abandoned for the religion of Mrs. George and of Mrs. Knox when she came to find happiness "within herself." Margaret Knox, with happiness within herself, knocks two teeth out of a policeman; and

all the best of Mr. Shaw's people have this rather excessive happiness within them, although the wires by which their author has communicated it are not always hid. The theatre of Mr. Shaw is a theatre out of which the devil of romance was cast and into which the seven devils of romance have entered. That is why it is such an amusing theatre. "The artist's work is to show us ourselves as we really are," says Tanner, but Mr. Shaw's theatre does not show us ourselves as we really are; it is quite free from "sawdid reeyellities." It shows us a world of Mr. Shaw's own witty invention, in which love and business and religion and even politics are violently amusing. Never was mortal lover stricken with such exciting symptoms as Valentine at first sight of his Gloria. Sex in the Shavian theatre becomes a duel, business becomes a glorious power over reality, religion an ecstasy, politics an arena in which Tom Broadbent is baited. "There are larger loves and diviner dreams than the fireside ones," says the ex-Major Barbara, and this and no other is the Secret in the Poet's Heart. What is Mr. Shaw's love of violence but an outcome of the "incurably romantic disposition" he shares with the hero of the anti-romantic comedy? This love of violence is the key to the best things in Mr. Shaw's art, as well as to the poorest. It is the key, on the one hand, to undergraduate pleasantries such as Tanner's "No man is a match for a woman except with a

poker and a pair of hob-nailed boots," and to all the things of excess and too great ease that we have considered. It is the key, on the other hand, to the quality of urgent and spirited speech which Mr. Shaw at his best has in common with the writers of the Restoration, and which it is his greatest merit to have brought back into the theatre. Unlike the verbal wit of Wilde, which is leisured and dainty, all the best of the verbal wit in Mr. Shaw's plays is sharp and explosive. "You call yourself a gentleman, and you offer me half!" "I do not call myself a gentleman, but I offer you half." It is not only the professional expert in explosives who has powers of retort of this deadly suddenness. "Respect! Treat my own daughter with respect!" explodes Mrs. Warren. The generally placid old lady who is mother to Ann and prospective grandmother to the superman goes off at her best moment with the ricochetting decisiveness of the firework known to schoolboys as the rip-rap: "Oh, she is a hypocrite. She is: she is. Isn't she?" Bohun is a big gun; the terrible Twins cultivate the frequency and deadliness of the Maxim; the typical Shaw raisonneur, whether he be named Tanner or Charteris or Richard Dudgeon or, more suitably, Hotchkiss, is nothing but an irrepressible sharpshooter potting at heads wherever he sees them; the *tempo* for the whole of the first and best of Mr. Shaw's comedies is given by that startling fusillade of Bulgarian

rifles outside the window; while, if we come back to character, there is nothing more economical and satisfying in the whole range of Mr. Shaw's persons than the sole and tremendous outburst of the Italian pirate Marzo: "Only dam thief. Dam liar. Dam rascal. . . . She saint. She get me to heaven—get us all to heaven. We do what we like now."

We have come back to character, and we have come to the last of Mr. Shaw's best plays, *The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet.* Between the two pieces written in emulation of the severe beauties of ancient Greek drama, Mr. Shaw happened to write a small masterpiece. Of all the plays with which Mr. Shaw has filled in the "hackneyed stage framework" which he set out to "humanize," none has more completely avoided his characteristic excesses nor come so near the human as the short play of *Blanco Posnet.* The place is "a territory of the United States of America," but it does not matter; its reality is established and its reality is preserved. The duration is about half an hour, and, while the reality of time is preserved very skilfully, it is long enough to contain both life and death. The people in it, a dozen or more, truly live, because in the short time they are before us each one of them is, by the exercise of the dramatist's art, able to act his or her nature, and to make good in some way the faculties, not of Mr. Shaw, but of themselves.

Because the play has its own comic vision, there is no need of comic relief; nor is there any tedious overplus through lack of the play's ability to prove a vehicle sufficient for its burden of philosophy. There is even about this play a sort of chastened beauty. It has not a symptom of G.B.S.'s complaint. The story of how religion found Blanco the horse-thief, or rather of how Blanco the horse-thief found religion—"within himself"—is an entertaining anecdote, but it is more, it is the perfectly effective expression through the theatre of what the author had it in him to express.

Mr. Bernard Shaw, the philosopher turned playwright, early in life took the advice the Statue gave to Don Juan: he "put his discoveries in the form of entertaining anecdotes." In another kind of examination, we might have looked into the nature of these discoveries, and ended on a note of thankfulness for the entertainment, not always inseparable from a study of philosophy, enjoyed by the way. This chapter has been concerned not with the discoveries of the philosopher, but with the precise form of the anecdotes devised by the playwright for our entertainment, and to contain the philosopher's view of life. It is not possible to end without thankfulness for the intellectual vivacity Mr. Shaw has brought to the theatre; but it is possible to remain perfectly conscious that he has not profoundly affected the

theatre because, speaking generally, he has not profoundly mastered it. It is for this reason, if our examination has been accurate, that Mr. Shaw remains, and perhaps we may now say that he is likely to remain, merely the most nearly major among the minor English dramatists.

VI

ST. JOHN HANKIN

THE English drama as Oscar Wilde left it is the English drama that St. John Hankin took up. "I took the drama," wrote Wilde, at the end of his life, "I took the drama, the most objective form known to art, and made it as personal a mode of expression as the lyric or sonnet; at the same time I widened its range and enriched its characterization." That he did not do all these things it is needless to say. Wilde made the theatre, or found the theatre rather, a perfect vehicle for his own personal wit; in a sense, by producing "Salomé" with the one hand and "The Importance of Being Earnest" with the other, he may be said to have widened its range; but certainly he did not proceed, by elevating character into its rightful importance above action, to open up a new path for contemporary drama. This he left to be done by his successors, and as much by St. John Hankin as by any man. Wilde enriched the English theatre with one perfectly delightful play, the

Continental theatre with another play of peculiar beauty, and the theatre everywhere with a tradition of wit at any cost that has proved, in the hands of lesser men, an embarrassing possession. He did not enrich at all the theatre's characterization, if by this we mean the creation of living and recognizable persons, to know whom is to know more of life, and to wonder at it more pleasurably. If Wilde could surprise us, he was well enough pleased; and his way of surprising us was by shining dialogue and by situations so artfully contrived as often to be quite impossible, rather than by the greater artist's way, which is to show us the wonders within the heart of man. At least he does surprise us, by dialogue and situation; and to do that is out of reach of the journeymen. But there is another way that the lesser and more sincere artist than Wilde may take. He may take the beaten path and, by keeping close to character, although he may surprise us very little, he may yet give us the real and constant pleasures of recognition. The advantage of keeping upon this path is that it is the path the great dramatist, when he comes, will inevitably tread, only he will find great surprises in it at every turn. The pioneer dramatist like Hankin—(and the beaten path in the arts is always in great need of pioneers)—if his bent be gently ironical, will write comedies with an intention very like that of the Restoration writers:

> Follies to-night we show ne'er lashed before,
> Yet such as nature shows you every hour ;
> Nor can the pictures give a just offence,
> For fools are made for jests to men of sense.

Hankin's people—one might almost write Hankin's fools, but not quite—may not, as Mrs. Cheveley in "An Ideal Husband" did, "make great demands on one's curiosity." But then, in reality, neither do Wilde's people, in the just sense that Shakespeare's or Sheridan's people do. The complete justification of Hankin's minor comedy of recognition is that Nature shows us such people every hour, and that the dramatist has rendered them noteworthy by his own fine sense of dramatic style.

Hankin's work for the theatre took the form of five full-length comedies, two short plays, and some clear-headed and witty criticism. If we look at the plays, we shall soon see how close, in 1904, he was to the Wilde tradition :

> LADY FARINGFORD [*to* MRS. JACKSON]. You remember her ? She was Stella's governess. Quite an intelligent, good creature. But I dare say you never met her. She never used to come down to dinner. I always think German governesses so much more satisfactory than English. You see, there's never any question about having to treat them as ladies. And then they're always so plain. That's a great advantage. And German is such a useful language, far more useful for a young girl than French. There are so many more books she can be allowed to read in it. French can be learnt later—and should be, in my opinion.

MRS. PRATT. I quite agree with you, Lady Faringford. But the Rector is less strict in these matters. He allowed my girls to begin French directly they went to school, at Miss Thursby's. But I am bound to say they never seem to have learnt any. So perhaps it did no harm.

MRS. JACKSON. Yes, I have always heard Miss Thursby's was an excellent school.

But Wilde would never have written *The Return of the Prodigal*. He would never have studied so patiently as Hankin did the lesser country houses of Gloucestershire, Leicestershire, and Dorsetshire. Hankin's first play is set in the suburb of Norwood, and in the suburb of Norwood Wilde could never have been prevailed upon to set foot at all. Lady Stutfield and the Archdeacon, Lady Bracknel and the Honourable Gwendolen, the Duchess of Berwick and her little chatterbox, were seen for a moment in galvanic action during the London season; their stage counterparts, without the wit, were already types in the theatres of Wilde's day. Hankin is at no pains to keep his people from appearing types, the vaguely fatuous old lady or the " very pretty girl of twenty-two " is of frequent recurrence; but Lady Faringford and Stella, Lady Denison and Margery, Mrs. Jackson or the Countess of Remenham, may at any moment falsify their author's small hope of them and develop a character. Hankin was happy in this too, that no sudden success in the theatre set him writing plays out of his mere cleverness

and facility. He waited, as the wise artist waits, for an idea, and then he made a play of it. Five plays, with Hankin, mean five genuine ideas, apt for comedy. A bad Mr. Wetherby, living in a bachelor flat, and a good Mr. Wetherby, living *en famille*, may shake hands over the walnuts and wine and congratulate one another, "My bad reputation is as hollow as your good one. We're both frauds together." A prodigal son so arranges his return that he gets the whip-hand of his family and is enabled to go out into the wilderness again replenished in his resources. An excellent lady and her pretty daughter arrive at an interesting distinction between the false hospitality and the true, in accordance with which they invite a lot of people to their house, not because they like them, but "out of kindness"—with results that are both dreadful and amusing. A wise little lady of family, whose son has engaged himself to the usual musical comedy actress, puts into practice, in the belief that "love thrives on opposition," a plan of killing it by kindness—an exercise, almost mathematical in its neatness, in the process of exhaustion. A minor county family, that has run all to tarnished family portraits and not at all to brains or character and now not even to sons, turns out of doors the daughter who has spirit enough to seek to live her life in her own way; and then, when she produces an heir, would like to take her back again—but she

won't come. The "idea" of a Hankin play is always concrete and well-imagined enough to be readily statable in a few words; and its progress is never cluttered up with a lot of unnecessary "ideas." Hankin is perfectly clear about the essential thing. "It is the dramatist's business," he says, in one of his essays on the plays of other people, "to represent life, not to argue about it."

He is equally clear about the things that make up good stage-craft, the audible and visible things in the dramatist's art that subserve dramatic idea in its illumination of character; but these he did not always achieve so clearly as he may have wished to have done. The critic, who finds it comparatively easy to know what he thinks good, is liable when he becomes author to find himself resting contented with the less good. It is probable that Hankin never wished very consciously for an art of the stage that was much in advance of that which he found around him—no more consciously than Wilde did; but in technical matters, in matters of the general ordering of his stage, his taste was for neatness and the elimination of conventions that were accepted merely because they were easy. His sense of the theatre, together with its subtlety, we see very early, when at the final curtain of his first play we have the bad Mr. Wetherby, newly constrained to accept his wife's dominion, and still very easy in his own mind about it, going out carrying "BOTH the bags."

In a later play there is a true instance of the way in which the authentic dramatist will secure effect out of the interplay of dialogue with stage possibilities. The Denison family, and guests, are at dinner, and as the man who looks after the dynamo has been accepted on the same principle as the guests, that of true hospitality—he isn't *really* an electrician—the lights suddenly go out. The ordinarily placid Lady Denison is worried, and hopes it isn't going to be one of his bad nights. The lights come on again, and she has no sooner said "That's better" than they go out afresh. This depresses her, but a moment later the lights recover, have a series of spasms, and finally settle to work again. This is very good; as good as the moment in Wilde's play, when Jack, having gone out of the room in great excitement to find the natal hand-bag, a terrible noise is heard overhead; "It is stopped now," remarks Lady Bracknel, and immediately the noise is redoubled. We all catch ourselves in these little acts of premature congratulation, and the recognition of other people making themselves ridiculous is always pleasant. In addition, Hankin's is a touch of the truest comedy; a great deal of dialogue could not give us with such beautiful precision the full amenity of life in this household where charity begins at home.

But Hankin's plays are not especially notable for their good ordering of the stage. He put up

with most of the conventions of the theatre as he found them. He suffered his first play to be printed with R.C. and L.C. and R.U.E., like a proposition in Euclid ; because he was frankly contented that his play should be acted by amateurs, and amateurs have to be told when and where and how to come on, to " move up " or to " cross " or to " come down," otherwise they would not be able to act a piece at all. (Happily, in the new collected edition, the play may be read without these things.) Later, of course, he evolved a form of literary stage direction that is particularly his own ; something more must be said of this in a moment. In the meantime we may see, by a glance at any one of the plays, that Hankin was content, even at the height of his powers, to ask actors and producers to do things that they should not be asked to do by a dramatist who has full mastery of his art. In *The Return of the Prodigal* there is a love scene at one side of the stage while, we are told, " everybody else is immersed in conversation "—conversation that goes nevertheless, by one of the most popular and arbitrary conventions of the stage, unreported. Shakespeare has no stage directions that are of guidance on this point, but he, of course, did not pretend to observe the new unity of the stage that, with its retirement within the picture-frame, has come by general consent to be desirable. By the time of the Restoration, however, we may read in several dramatists the

direction, "They talk in dumb show"—that is to say, one pair of characters has been made to relapse into a sudden silence, not because in reality they would have done so, but factitiously, in order that another pair may have the centre of the stage. This expedient of convenience is a characteristic part of the Pinero technique; and in *The Cassilis Engagement* we read, sure enough, "They converse in dumb show"—while another couple "come down stage" and engage our ear. There is no question of right or wrong in this, merely the confession that the dramatist has taken the easiest way instead of conquering an unnecessary convention; for "to conquer an unnecessary convention is one of the greatest delights of an art: to loyally accept and work within a necessary convention is no less a delight"—a remark that Mr. Henry Arthur Jones made once, but did not proceed conspicuously to exemplify. Much depends, of course, upon what are the necessary conventions. But here is Hankin, in illustration of the general willingness we have found in him to be upon the side of good sense and economy in technical matters, doing very much better only a few minutes earlier in the same play. Major Warrington and Ethel, it will be remembered, have just been having a rather intimate little talk together. "*Meantime*" (we read)

LADY REMENHAM *has been conversing in an undertone with* MRS. HERRIES, *occasionally glancing over her shoulder*

at the other two. In the sudden hush which follows WARRINGTON'S *movement towards the fireplace, her voice suddenly becomes alarmingly audible.*

LADY REMENHAM. Such a common little thing, too! And *I* don't even call her pretty.

This is at least an admission of the claims of good technique, and an honest attempt at their satisfaction; it is a scene that need not distress the best of producers. In itself—and Hankin's work is full of instances of such honest good workmanship—it is an advance on anything Wilde saw to be necessary, who would crowd his stage with conversational groups and bring out one after another into audibility like couples circulating on a merry-go-round; while any necessary business that there might be to be considered, he would generally impart quite naïvely in a soliloquy. Hankin is never guilty of soliloquy—or almost never: Janet de Mullin remarks "under her breath," it is true, "Monty Bulstead! engaged!" a lapse which gives us a bad quarter of a minute in a play that is otherwise well-written. But Hankin's returned prodigal, having safely secured admission to the family drawing-room, and everybody having run in various directions in search of restoratives, does not get up and tell us all about himself. Oh no. He takes advantage of the moment to "raise himself cautiously from his recumbent posture and wring out the bandage on his forehead, which he finds disagreeably wet." This done, he hears

the sound of returning footsteps, and "resumes his fainting condition." Everything about the prodigal is revealed in due order and with a proper piquancy; this moment is used in masterly fashion, and is a true instance of Hankin's faculty of quietly humorous surprise. It is a moment of very good comedy indeed.

We cannot go further without considering the general question of stage directions. Every play that can be read—(and every good play can be read, make no mistake about that)—must make plain to the reader by means of commentary upon the words and actions of the persons all those things which, in the theatre, would be made plain to the spectator by the actor's art and by the constant co-operating service of the stage. Drama is one-half a matter of visual demonstration: a blind man sitting in a theatre could take away only one-half of a true play's content; and to read the bare printed words of a play is to be in the position of the blind man. The function of the printed stage directions is to supply all that difference between what would be apprehended by the blind man and what would be apprehended by the spectator with the whole quintette of his senses about him. But their function is not to supply more. Mr. Shaw's stage directions do supply more; they will give us the appearance of the front steps, of the entrance-hall, and of the staircase of a house, of which in the theatre we

see only the interior of one room; and when we get to this room the stage directions will describe it, perhaps, from the point of view of a supernaturally observant sparrow on the window-sill. Mr. Shaw's stage directions do not stop short of giving us the whole flora and fauna of the neighbourhood, together with the prevailing political opinion, and the amount of the water-rate. But Mr. Shaw's narrative excursions are not in any strict sense stage directions at all; they are delightfully readable, and he could no more issue a play without them than he could issue a play without a preface. Hankin, who did issue a Play without a Preface, hit upon a very happy mean between Mr. Shaw's narrative excursions and the alphabetical efforts of the school whose plays look like a handbook of instructions for one desirous of becoming proficient in the Morse code. His stage directions, besides adding to our pleasure by the neatly pointed wit of their expression, do really achieve their true function, that of giving us exactly, or almost exactly, what we miss through not seeing the play in the theatre. The best moment in the best of Hankin's comedies is thus one in which dialogue plays a small part. Ethel Borridge, bored stiff in the Cassilis drawing-room, and rendered quite reckless by the German ballad Mabel has just sung very prettily, determines to show these people what *she* can do. She plunges into a "refined ditty," in which the Hankin who

wrote *Lost Masterpieces* has caught quite perfectly the style of the less-than-first-rate music-hall article. The effect is critical:

MAJOR WARRINGTON. Splendid, by Jove! Capital! *That, however, is clearly not the opinion of the rest of the listeners, for the song has what is called a "mixed" reception. The ladies, for the most part, had originally settled themselves into their places prepared to listen to anything which was set before them with polite indifference. A few bars, however, suffice to convince them of the impossibility of that attitude.* LADY REMENHAM, *who is sitting on the sofa by* LADY MARCHMONT, *exchanges a horrified glance with that lady, and with* MRS. HERRIES *on the other side of the room.* MABEL *looks uncomfortable. The* RECTOR *feigns abstraction.* MRS. CASSILIS *remains calm and sweet, but avoids every one's eye, and more particularly* GEOFFREY'S, *who looks intensely miserable. But* WARRINGTON *enjoys himself thoroughly, and as for* MRS. BORRIDGE, *her satisfaction is unmeasured. She beats time to the final chorus, wagging her old head and joining in in stentorian accents, finally jumping up from her chair, clapping her hands, and crying "That's right, Eth. Give 'em another." In fact, she feels that the song has been a complete triumph for her daughter, and a startling vindication of old Jenkins's good opinion of her powers. Suddenly, however, she becomes conscious of the horrified silence which surrounds her. The cheers die away on her lips. She looks round the room, dazed and almost frightened, then hurriedly reseats herself in her chair, from which she has risen in her excitement, straightens her wig, and—there is an awful pause.*

Here we are told—very well told—everything we need to know, and nothing that we need not. If we have an ounce of imagination we can see

the whole scene for ourselves; but no foolish attempt is made to leave nothing to the imagination. To understand how well and surely this scene is done, we have to read, not only in the stage directions of other dramatists, but in those of Hankin himself. He is not always, as we have seen, equally sure of himself: if he had been quite as conscious as he might have been that the burden of the dramatist's directions is merely What the Actor Has to Show, and nothing else, he would hardly have set Margery Denison the task of showing that she was "quite unconscious of her mother's agitation, as she sat too far from her at luncheon to notice that she was not in her usual spirits." Margery, by her demeanour in the drawing-room, could hardly be expected to show all that. No, Hankin is here frankly telling us something—as frankly in his own interpolated person as when he tells us somewhere else in the same play that Verreker does not like Hylton, "I'm afraid." This is, however, the defect of a quality. Hankin really did believe in the drama as "the most objective form known to art." He is determined that his people shall stand upon their own feet; and, in the light of this admirable determination, his affectation that he knows no more about them than does the reader or spectator is seen to be an amiable little pose.

Of course an absolute objectivity is as impossible in drama as in any other of the arts. Hankin

himself is not for ever speaking through the mouths of his people, as Mr. Shaw is, reducing them to mere raisonneurs; but in their every utterance there is something of his own sense of style and form—his people bear the impress of their author, or they would not be his people at all. The most realistic of artists has thus to put shape upon events and speeches, or he is no artist. It is probable that Hankin was not a very conscious realist; but because he kept character in the forefront, and refused to give in to what was sentimentally expected of him, he was able to make that scene of Ethel shocking her fiancé's drawing-room as truthful a scene as any on the modern stage. We see most clearly his views on objectivity in drama in the essay, already quoted, On Happy Endings. Being content to represent life, and not wishing to argue about it, he need not "end," as the writer with a thesis wishes to end. His plays have each the neatness and inevitability of a theorem or proposition, but at the end of them there is no Q.E.F. or Q.E.D. This is what he set out to do with his plays: "I select an episode in the life of one of my characters or a group of characters, when something of importance to their future has to be decided, and I ring up my curtain. Having shown how it was decided, and why it was so decided, I ring it down again. The episode is over, and with it the play. The end is 'inconclusive' in the sense that it proves nothing. Why

should it ? " Why should it, indeed ? Does not " Le Misanthrope " of Molière end with the words, " Come, Madam, let us leave no stone unturned to hinder the plan he has in view " ?—inconclusive words, and yet we are left in no discontent, because the play is certainly over. It is quite a different matter from the ending on a question mark (which is thought to be so clever just now), for no other reason than that the writer has not skill enough to bring his play to a proper end. Hankin, who took the liberty, before he wrote plays of his own, of showing in his *Dramatic Sequels* that other people's plays need not have ended so soon as they did, showed, in his own turn, that plays need not go on so long. They might stop short of wedding bells. His own do, invariably ; partly because to end thus pleased his amiable cynicism, partly because to end thus was quite right. One play, his first, he spoiled ; after first begging the question (" I wonder how you two ever came to marry ") the courage of his cynicism failed him, and he flattered the amateurs by reuniting his Constantia and his Dick. Afterwards the endings are uniformly " inconclusive " and uniformly right ; the disturbing person, having fluttered the dovecote—Eustace or Verreker or Ethel Borridge or Janet de Mullin—goes out, and the dovecote settles once more into its lazy and unimaginative peace. The country house is at rest again, free to take cold baths and to shoot partridges, to crochet counterpanes

for the sick and to manipulate orphans into asylums. That is the true ending for the people Hankin chose to depict. The interesting, disturbing people in such circles generally do disappear. There is nothing more manifestly recognizable in Hankin than the truthfulness of his endings.

The chief defect in Hankin's plays is their lack of emotional momentum. His comedy is as minor as that of the Restoration writers, but what he makes up in sincerity they made up in splendid, spirited speech. "How pleasant is resenting an injury without passion," says Sir Harry Wildair, a damnable sentiment, stated quite beautifully; and Hankin's people always do everything "without passion." Their author doubtless felt it was pleasanter so. His inability, after he has given his people life, to give them ardour, does not matter much until we come to Janet de Mullin, whose tirade against her family sounds a little thin and tinny for lack of her eagerness in life having been made real to us. Hankin's last play is in many ways his ablest; but on the title-page of his first play he wrote a line from Horace Walpole: "Life is a comedy to those who think, a tragedy to those who feel," that retained its application to his own work to the end. For Hankin thought his way successfully through most of his comedies. But the theme of *The Last of the De Mullins* is one that demands more feeling

than he was able to give to it. "Then I met—never mind. And I fell in love with him. Or perhaps I only fell in love with love," says Janet. It is a subject for feeling; but we feel it no more than we feel the "One may like the love and despise the lover, I hope," of Farquhar's pert Melinda. It would not be quite true to say that Hankin worked with his brain alone; numberless touches that we recognize for their emotional truthfulness would have been beyond him so; there are passages like the following, with sufficient feeling:

GEOFFREY [*picking rose and bringing it to* ETHEL]. A rose for the prettiest girl in England.

ETHEL. Oh, Geoff, do you think so?

GEOFFREY. Of course. The prettiest and the best. [*Takes her hand.*]

ETHEL. You do really love me, Geoff, don't you?

GEOFFREY. Do you doubt it? [*Kisses her.*]

ETHEL. No; you're much too good to me, you know.

GEOFFREY. Nonsense, darling.

ETHEL. It's the truth. You're a gentleman and rich, and have fine friends, while mother and I are common as common.

GEOFFREY [*firmly*]. You're *not.*

ETHEL. Oh yes, we are. Of course I've been to school and been taught things. But what's education? It can't alter how we're made, can it? And she and I are the same underneath.

GEOFFREY. Ethel, you're not to say such things, or to think them.

ETHEL. But they're true, Geoff.

GEOFFREY. They're not. [*Kisses her.*] Say they're not.

ETHEL [*shakes her head*]. No.
GEOFFREY. Say they're *not.* [*Kisses her.*] *Not!*
ETHEL. Very well. They're not.
GEOFFREY. That's right. [*Kiss.*] There's a reward.

The last thing to leave Hankin's hand, *The Constant Lover*, is all as good as that, a beautifully sustained trifle, very amiable, rather cynical, and very human. Fortunately, being in one act, it has only one curtain. Hankin's final curtains are always good, but he often fails at his intermediate curtains —because of his lack of emotional momentum. For it is the fact that criticism may test a dramatist most surely at the moment when he is ringing down his intermediate curtain: it has merely to ask itself the question, Do I want this play to go on? Is the veil that is coming between me and this uncompleted world almost intolerable? It should be (except at the last; when its very inevitability should, of course, be satisfying). By however little the dramatist may have left the beaten path of everyday experience, here, nevertheless, is a moment that must have been so contrived as to "make great demands on one's curiosity." With Hankin, it must be said, one is not so anxious as one should be for the play to go on. Of course one wants his plays to go on—they would be unreadable otherwise, or unable to hold their place in their theatre; which emphatically is not the case. But one is a little—what shall we say?—subdued in one's eagerness.

Partly this is because the plays, by their nature, hold no great surprise; they will work out, we know they will work out—we know the prodigal will return to the wilderness, the Cassilis engagement end only one way, and so on. Essentially the pleasure of recognition we have in his work is of two kinds—the pleasure of meeting people we know, the pleasure of seeing the episode in which Hankin has involved these people come to its logical end. This end will not surprise us; there is no great crisis being, at each curtain, cleverly deferred. It is a patient, amiable enjoyment that a Hankin play offers. But it might well have a greater, a more steadily growing, momentum; this comes in only with true feeling, and the measure of its absence in Hankin is the measure of the difference of his drama from the greatest.

There are, nevertheless, two acts quite perfectly ended: the first act of the *De Mullins*, with its skilfully contrived passage between the sisters; and the first act of *The Cassilis Engagement*—"Marry her! Nonsense, my dear Margaret." These are evidence once more of the good things Hankin could do, for which his work will always be valued. He could be quite heartless, as when he is emphasizing some one's "fatuity," or in the uncharitable episode of the maid Anson, in the charitable comedy; and then again he could make real a Mrs. Cassilis or an Ethel or a Mrs. Jackson, which no merely clever man could do. At any

moment, too, he may demand our pleasure by the gently reminiscent skill with which he reminds us that if we breakfast in our room the crumbs get into our bed, or that it is the custom after a really terrible experience to thank our hostess for such a pleasant evening. It is a quality that is near, at least, to the humour that is universal. By an accident of commercial organization Hankin's work has been kept from the general theatre, but it will find its place there, and it will keep its place, because it will continue to give this pleasure.

VII

GRANVILLE BARKER

INTO the English theatre there came with the first of the plays of Mr. Granville Barker the deliberate indication that here was a writer whose delight it would be to attempt the difficult. There is a popular delusion in the theatre that the diction to which great pains have gone to make perfect will impose great pains in its turn upon the auditor; which is absurd, because the only test of dramatic diction is the degree in which it can please us by going right in at our ear—the more perfectly it is shaped, the more easy it will be of apprehension. And this is true, not only of its diction, but of the whole constitution of the drama. A man may write in many ways and leave us ultimately satisfied that we have taken all his meaning in; but when a man speaks his speech must be such, if it is to satisfy us, that our ear is served moment by moment with just so much as the ear in a moment can take in. It is a confused perception of this obvious distinction between the literary and dramatic arts that

kept Browning and Meredith out of the English theatre while it filled it full of a kind of diction that sacrificed everything to readiness of apprehension, and of a kind of character and event that had become unmistakable through long familiarity. Nothing could be more familiar, and therefore more readily recognized, than the language of the newspaper we had just thrown aside; and the English theatre was contented to reproduce this. But while familiarity is one thing, *intimacy* is quite another. We shall find the art of Mr. Granville Barker to be an intimate art. And we shall find that his drama takes its rise not in a belief in an unnatural ease to be attained by adherence to several factitious rules and conventions, but in a desire to express through the theatre as much of his own personal view of things as can possibly be given that form and shape which are necessary to effective expression through the theatre. In its deliberate courting of the difficult—it is no mere casual flirtation—Mr. Barker's is a definitely experimental drama; we may say that he is the first definite experimentalist in the modern English theatre.

Now a man whose apprenticeship to the theatre consists in speaking other men's lines upon its boards is not the man to shape his own work without regard to the theatre's conditions. Mr. Barker's plays, however diverse, have in common the desire to do something at once larger and more

intimate than his contemporaries are doing, and they have also the technical equipment by which alone, in any art, this desire will be safe from frustration. A play by Granville Barker is first and foremost, whatever its unorthodoxy, a play that works. The play about the young lady of family who married with the gardener is the play of a young man sometimes remembering Meredith ; but it works in the theatre—it works better than " The Sentimentalists " of his master. The play about the defaulting solicitor who died in honour and left to his son an inheritance of doubt and difficulty is, with only so much stated, a good play ; but in the hands of this dramatist it took on cheerfully the proportions of an epic of middle-class family life in the latter days of the nineteenth century, and remained a good play. The play about a man whose usefulness to the State was sacrificed rather than that the State should appear to condone the private fault which was irrelevant to his public usefulness, became, since Mr. Barker was the dramatist, not merely a picture of political society in the Edwardian era, but a vehicle for the expression of a whole carefully considered plan for the endowment of education and the disestablishment of the Church. Still, it carried its burden ; it was not by any inadaptability to the theatre of its generously imagined materials that the play fell something short of the most memorable tragedy. Mr. Barker next wrote a comedy

that had for its unity nothing less than the conduct and whole implications of a trade, and that managed somehow, between its first act and its last, to look much of contemporary civilization in the face; and who will be found at this time of day to deny that *The Madras House*, for three-fourths of its length at least, gave rise to the emotions proper to comedy? From *The Marrying of Ann Leete* to the end of Act Three of *The Madras House*, Mr. Barker's plays *work*: that is the first of their merits. If we are clear about that, we may proceed to see how they work, to what end in pleasure and profit, and with what significance for the future of the English theatre.

When the curtain first rose on the earliest of the plays, it will be remembered that Ann's scream that came through the darkness of the garden was prelude to the following conversation:

LORD JOHN CARP. I apologize.
ANN. Why is it so dark?
LORD JOHN. Can you hear what I'm saying?
ANN. Yes.
LORD JOHN. I apologize for having kissed you . . . almost unintentionally.
ANN. Thank you. Mind the steps down.
LORD JOHN. I hope I'm sober, but the air . . .
ANN. Shall we sit for a minute? There are several seats to sit on somewhere.
LORD JOHN. This is a very dark garden.

Now we have here a dialogue of a deliberate nicety that is pleasing; we have the true question

and answer, not always in the closest consequence, and sentences that are sometimes left in the air, as we sometimes leave them—things that are engaging in themselves if we recognize them, and that contribute to the general impression of naturalness none the less if we don't. They are qualities quite apart from the fact that Ann, the young lady who married with the gardener, was an eighteenth-century young lady who was breathless from just having been kissed; for we have only to remember the rise of the curtain on a later play to recall that the conversation of present-day people in a country-house drawing-room discovers just the same qualities. Similarly, the true answer to Constantine's "You are a poet, Mr. State," is Mr. State's answer, "I never wrote one in my life, sir;" but it is not the answer another dramatist would have thought of. This, then, is the first of this dramatist's discoveries, that we really speak like that, rather than like a newspaper, as Sir Arthur Pinero would have us think that we speak. We may say of Mr. Barker, slightly varying what was said of another, "He has an ear." And now let us hasten, having used the word "real," to repudiate the idea, inseparable from the word in some minds, that Mr. Barker is either a phonograph or a newspaper man with a notebook. It is a curious omission of these minds to fail to remember that it is the newspaper man with his notebook who produces those inter-

views in the papers in which the originals cannot hear themselves speak. In fact, the reporter is not a dramatist, and the dramatic realist in his dialogue, astonishingly as the news may come to some, is not a reporter. He has not only an ear, he has an imagination; and what the ear hears the imagination so shapes that we may hear it also, as it occurred and as, in the theatre, we may be caused to believe that it occurred. When Mrs. Ebbsmith, who was very fond of Mr. Lucas Cleeve and lived with him on terms of the closest intimacy, said what she thought of his essay, we know that if the expression of opinion ever occurred it did not occur in the least in that manner, and so we are forced to believe that the people never really did occur either. So subtle is the interrelation between truthfulness in small things, and truthfulness in great. It is this interrelation that the realist understands. But just as events can never be made to exist until they have been through his imagination, so words can become real by no other process; until, that is, they issue with that imagination's impress. We have noticed in the first persons to leave Mr. Barker's hands a deliberate nicety of speech, and this does not desert his persons whether they move over the sward at Markswayde with Mr. Carnaby Leete, late of Mr. Pitt's Cabinet, or sit in a library in Queen Anne's Gate as prospective members of Lord Horsham's; or merely rotate between business in Peckham and

a house at Denmark Hill in salubrious enjoyment of a view of the Crystal Palace. It is the impress by which they are Mr. Barker's, and not Sir Arthur Pinero's or Mr. Bernard Shaw's. It is only a step from Ann's " I had rather, my lord, that you did not tell my brother why I screamed—I had rather, Lord John, that you had not told my brother why I screamed," to the phraseology of the correct Mrs. Huxtable when she learned that Woking was a cheerful place, " I had thought not for some reason." The step is a hundred years or so in real time, but only some ten in Mr. Barker's mastery of comic diction.

The distinguishing characteristic of Mr. Barker's comic diction, then, is its intimacy. He can give this personal quality to the diction of another dramatist when he " paraphrases " Schnitzler's " Anatol." When they ask Ann in the dark garden whether she is blushing after being kissed, she replies, " I am by the feel of me " ; and we are often next the skin, as it were, of Mr. Barker's people—sometimes almost indecently. That engaging soul Mr. Huxtable has acquired Macaulay, Erbert Spencer, and Grote's Istory of Greece in the intervals of the drapery business, and one can feel the physical twinge of satisfied ownership in the words, " I've got 'em all there." Extraordinary how near we come to the little beating heart, like a rattled pea, of dapper Mr. Booth when he says, " One can't lose half of all one has and then be told of

it in two minutes . . . sitting at a table." The dialogue is attended, ever so closely, by a small circling humour. "Are you going to be married?" demands brother George of Abud the gardener, whose reply is "Not especially, sir." "A boy or a girl, Dimmuck?" asks Ann of the butler when Mrs. George is brought to bed, and the answer comes, "Yes, miss." This humour, as the plays go on, takes to throwing the most sudden of little lights, sometimes deep into character. It is illuminating to hear of brother George Leete that he is "a cork, trying to sink socially"; but it is positively the completest possible revelation of the whole heart and soul of Mrs. Voysey, to have her begin to retire for the night and pause at the door to say, "I'm not pleased with you, Beatrice." The speech of Mr. Barker's persons, every moment that they live, is for ever taking some such twist or turn that shows us some new facet of the truth about themselves, as when Mr. Huxtable begins the speech to his errant brother-in-law which he has been preparing for thirty years, "And I come here to-day full of forgiveness" . . . and completes it with "and curiosity. . . ." The lambent humour that is throwing lights on these people, the hand that is causing them to turn about and display themselves, is of course Mr. Barker's, but their naturalness, we would say, is their own. This most essential unity, the unity of character, is preserved so perfectly that, if we are reading the

plays, the very stage directions seem, when they refer to crumpled Mr. Booth as "the poor old thing" or to Mr. Huxtable as a "buffer," merely to have found the intimacy infectious, and not to suggest the showman speaking in his own person at all. For the most part, it is the perfect stage direction that Mr. Barker gives us—all that we ought to see, as Mr. Barker, skilled man of the theatre, sees it. This matter of stage directions is important. The intimacy of Mr. Barker's art cannot be better established than by a reference to the comfortable office of Voysey and Son at the opening of the fourth act. "It has somehow lost that brilliancy which the old man's occupation seemed to give it." That is how we have got to see the room; the desire that we should see it thus, and the fact that Mr. Barker *has* so seen it, is an example, of the kind that one would emphasize, of the subtlety of this dramatist's theatrical vision. He has an eye.

The attempt to look all round, which we have found in Mr. Barker's dialogue and character is matched by an equal attempt to round all in, which we may look for rather in incidental detail. *The Voysey Inheritance*, *Waste*, and *The Madras House*, in their different fields, are triumphs of Rounding In. The marshalling of the circumstances by which there came to be a Voysey inheritance for Edward to shoulder could not be more thorough if Mr. Barker had been briefed by the Crown. In

the comedy of drapery, the dramatist's zest in the facts that at a Peckham emporium the two hundred and thirty-five gentlemen get thirty pounds a year allowed them if they live " out " and jam roly-poly if they live " in," is quite equal to his zest in Mr. Windlesham's narration of the exact manner of the genesis of a Parisian cocotte's new hat. If the Conservative party could not go to the country at the next election on the proposals presented gratis with the play of *Waste*, it is not for a layman to say why. And this brings us to the second of Mr. Barker's discoveries.

The plays of Mr. Granville Barker make it clear that the creation of character, which is the business of the dramatist, need not stop short at the creation of individual character only, but may go on to the creation of what one may call the corporate character of a group. A play by this author is in fact a series of dramatizations of these group emotions, each proper to the play's progressing effect. Thus the true business of the dramatist, under this technique, is seen to be the realization of the moment's mood. In the plays of the dramatist Tchekoff, in " Uncle Vanya " and " The Cherry Orchard " in particular, this technique is carried to a further point of conscious achievement than Mr. Barker has yet carried it; but really the unity of *The Madras House* is just as much a matter of an impalpable

presiding influence, independent, one would almost say, of individual character or incident, as is the unity of "The Cherry Orchard." There is every reason to believe that Mr. Barker has arrived at this subtle dramatic technique entirely for himself.[1] Evidence of what is meant is to be found in any piece of dialogue that we may take at random. This, from *Waste:*

FRANCES TREBELL. I think it's a mistake to stand outside a system. There's an inhumanity in that amount of detachment. . . .

MRS. FARRANT [*brilliantly*]. I think a statesman may be a little inhuman.

LADY DAVENPORT [*with keenness*]. Do you mean superhuman? It's not the same thing, you know.

MRS. FARRANT. I know.

LADY DAVENPORT. Most people don't know.

MRS. FARRANT [*proceeding with her cynicism*]. Humanity achieves . . . what? Housekeeping and children.

FRANCES TREBELL. As far as a woman's concerned.

MRS. FARRANT [*a little mockingly*]. Now, Mamma, say that is as far as a woman's concerned.

[1] The deliberate nature of this dramatist's adherence to the moment's reality is evinced when Edward—in reply to Mr. Booth's question whether he was present at the evening at Chislehurst—is made to answer, "I dare say." Another dramatist would have taken it for granted that they both remembered quite perfectly every incident of that evening two years ago, for no better reason than that in the theatre only an hour has elapsed. But then, another dramatist would have made old Mr. Voysey die of the chill he took before our eyes in the second act, instead of from some merely unspecified chill taken nine months later

LADY DAVENPORT. My dear, you know I don't think so.

MRS. FARRANT. We may none of us think so. But there's our position . . . bread and butter and a certain satisfaction until . . . Oh, Mamma, I wish I were like you . . . beyond all the passions of life.

LADY DAVENPORT [*with great vitality*]. I'm nothing of the sort. It's my egoism's dead . . . that's an intimation of mortality.

MRS. FARRANT. I accept the snub. But I wonder what I'm to do with myself for the next thirty years.

It matters positively nothing to us what Mrs. Farrant, wife of a minor Cabinet minister, will do with herself for the next thirty years; no more than whether the egoism of Lady Davenport, whom we never meet again, is dead. But this is not to say that any touch in this dialogue is without its value, for these remarks that lead apparently out of the play's unity instead of into it, have their definite purpose in the creation of mood.[1] When one says that this recognition of the needs of the play's momentary mood as the primary arbiter in a play's construction is the discovery of Tchekoff and of Mr. Granville Barker, one does not mean that the recognition is not implied in the work of much earlier dramatists, but only that it is in their plays for the first time

[1] Mr. George Calderon, in writing of the drama of Tchekoff, has made use of the terms "centrifugal" and "centripetal" for the dialogue which tends away from and the dialogue which tends towards the play's apparent centre.

quite conscious and deliberate. *The Voysey Inheritance*, *The Madras House*, and *Waste* proceed in the knowledge that no audience can gather up and carry forward every detail of their transactions legal, political, or commercial-philosophic, but that every such detail, whether of character or incident, is justified in so far as it is making smooth and inevitable the progress of the audience from mood to mood. The knowledge that this emotional apprehension is all that is really necessary to a play's full appreciation is the true solvent of the delusion regarding dramatic dialogue which was touched on at the beginning of this chapter. In a play by Mr. Granville Barker the things that emerge serve to suggest much more beneath, and in this much more, apprehended but perhaps not fully comprehended, the play's real unity lies.

This building of a play cell by living cell, as it were, goes a good way to achieve a living organism. And it is the fact that Mr. Barker's plays have extraordinary life. What are the scenes in them which remain most clearly in the memory? Certainly those of the Voysey family summoned to the dining-room to hear the truth about an old man they have just put, with every circumstance of honour, into the grave; of the meeting of prospective ministers to decide what is to be done about Trebell; of the third-act gathering beneath the rotunda of the Madras House whither the

American financier has come to negotiate a purchase and whence he does not depart until he has enjoyed as stimulating a conversation as he can remember. Each of these scenes shows clearly what one means by the achievement of group-emotion. They show the art of Mr. Barker at its best. Each person in them, while a true person studied with the intimate humorous care we have noted, lives, not for his own sake, but for the sake of the scene. This is the triumph of dramatic characterization. The dining-room at Chislehurst pleases as a number by M. Fokine's Ballet pleases ; it is the perfection of individual freedom within the perfection of unifying control.

And we may go on to say that Mr. Barker's drama ceases fully to please when a remark or a person ceases to have definite value in the creation of mood. Then we have the Loose End. There were no loose ends in the passage quoted from *Waste*, because that women's talk all made, every word of it, for the moment's particular reality. In *The Voysey Inheritance*, Major Booth's conversational opening, "I'm not a conceited man——," does not exist for its own sake and degrade him to the ranks of the "silly soldier men." Major Booth Voysey, the soldier son, exists for the play's sake, and never becomes a loose end, in the manner in which Hugh Voysey, the artist son, becomes a loose end. With Hugh Voysey's conversational fireworks

in the fourth act, and with Hugh Voysey's divorce in the fifth, the play of idea takes two steps into the play of ideas. The dreadful danger of the play of ideas is that the ideas may exist for their own sake instead of for the play's sake, and thus become nothing but loose ends. Now here we have to tread cautiously, lest we do Mr. Barker an injustice. It is necessary to distinguish very clearly between Mr. Barker's drama and the drama of certain active young writers who, while they may have a superficial appearance of being followers of Mr. Barker, are in fact followers, at a considerable distance doubtless, of Mr. Bernard Shaw. For example, Mr. Shaw with "Man and Superman" rendered quite popular the theatrical amusement of guying one's mother, and to-day a whole school of young dramatists is busy Guying its Mother, with a view to showing how very "advanced" are its ideas. But Mr. Barker does not guy his mother. Mrs. Huxtable remains happy in the possession of her own dignity, while between Mrs. Voysey and her reprehensible old pirate there is a passage at the end of the second act that is quite beautiful in its sympathy and truth. Nowhere in his plays is this dramatist betrayed into that contempt for his own persons which cannot be indulged without a loss in sympathy, which is as much as to say a loss in art. Mr. Huxtable is, quite certainly, a "lovable old buffer"; a dramatist filled with the "idea"

that the coarseness of suburban shopkeepers is deplorable, could never have created him. But perhaps the completest example of the dramatist's sympathy is to be found in the pathetic little wrangle in the waiting-room of Mr. Huxtable's emporium, where there is the most exemplary dispensation of even-handed justice. Nor is Mr. Barker either master or pupil in the school which seeks to show its superiority to the common theatre's sentimental handling of death by being funny about death. "Life does not cease to be funny" because the Voyseys are come fresh from a funeral; but Mr. Barker's people are capable of speaking, as Mr. Shaw's are not, "as one speaks of the dead."

Mr. Barker, with the realist's perception of the ludicrous ever waiting close upon the dignified, the worthy twisting suddenly to show the unworthy, the little thing ready to trip up the great, is, however, the comic ironist always. His comedy is the comedy of contrast. Verbally, what is it that makes irresistible in its context such a simple thing as "That's Ruskin's house, is it? Yes, I see the chimney-pots?"—we may leave it to M. Bergson to analyse the precise nature of the effect of Denmark Hill chimney-pots upon a physical system braced up to Ruskin, and rest content with the fact that we laugh. Visually, how comic it is that while Miss Yates, with her tragic little history, should be going out, and

while Jessica, with her proposals for luncheon, should be coming in, poor Major Tommy should struggle impotently with the telephone in the foreground. This is the comedy of cross-currents —not for a moment to be confused with that horrible breaking up of the unity of impression into little bits which some dramatists mistake for contrast, or perhaps for Futurism. To come to bigger things, the plays themselves are built on contrast. If we were to analyse the quality of our pleasure in the first act of *The Madras House*, it would be accurate to say that it gave us the pleasure of recognition, with the pleasure of surprise, in a lesser degree, secured verbally. Similarly with our pleasure in the third act of *The Voysey Inheritance*—only here, when Mrs. Voysey says, "I have known of this for a long time," we have one of the few instances of Mr. Barker's use of a surprise that is deeper than verbal. For the characteristic of Mr. Barker's plays is a humorous irony which flickers perpetually but rarely flames into surprise. When the table goes up at the end of the one-act *Rococo* and the vase is smashed as a result of the eagerness of the parties to possess it, we are not surprised; but we have been continually delighted by the contrast between this spirited contentiousness and the hideous uselessness of its subject. In *Waste*, it is the bungling new man at Lord Horsham's who contributes most powerfully to the emotional

intensity of the scene that is to decide upon life and death for Trebell; and it is the grave interest of the two statesmen and cousins in the fate of their Aunt Mary's Holbein which assures us at the end of the scene that, whatever it may hold for Trebell, life will still go on. The whole vision of the Voysey splendour at Chislehurst, based as we know it to be upon the Voysey depredations at Lincoln's Inn, is comically ironic, even in such little things as the discovery of Mrs. Voysey that the Chinese Empire must be in a shocking state, and the episode of Mr. Booth's Christmas presents; until, in the play's last fifteen minutes, the author becomes a little earnest about the future of his two young people, and the play's unity is spoiled. It is almost as though, the play's idea being over, he thought he were at liberty now for a little indulgence in ideas. Two plays (not to mention *Prunella*, that perfect trifle) come to their end without any such evil indulgence. The play about the young lady who married with the gardener rather than with any of her father's fine friends, because, said she, "we've all been in too great a hurry getting civilized," is a genuine play of idea, though it may not fully persuade us; when the idea is exemplified, the play ends with its final exemplification, the gardener lighting the young lady up the cottage stairs to bed. *Waste* is a play of idea, in which we have seen that the ideas, admirable as they may be, are never suffered to become

loose ends; the play's end is the idea's final utterance, one and inseparable, "Oh . . . the waste . . ." But with what degree of truth may we say that the ending of *The Madras House* is the final and inevitable exemplification of that play's idea? Here again, we must go cautiously.

If we have been accurate in our analysis of the way in which Mr. Barker builds his plays, it must be plain that it is his wish to leave us at the end not with the memory of an incident, not with the memory of an apophthegm that has a false air of being inclusive, but with the memory of a mood. A mood is a thing that may take a little building, and Philip and Jessica, even more than Edward and Alice, have an air of being conscious of their responsibility. The trouble with *The Madras House* is that the mood is such a difficult one to create; "for really," says the dramatist, "there is no end to the subject." The end to *The Madras House* is not the sale of the Madras House, as the end to Tchekoff's "Cherry Orchard" is the sale of the cherry orchard. If the mood we are to remember as the curtain falls is the mood of Philip and Jessica "happy together," then this mood might have been achieved more economically than by the presentation of a typical twenty minutes in the lives of this nice couple who are the most confirmed of chatters about the health of the world. A dramatist who is out to do something difficult has a perfect right to choose some-

thing which, like most true ideas, has "really no end." But he has no right whatever to make us tired with its interminability before he lets us go. We are not made tired with the interminability of life as it stretches before Uncle Vanya and Marina at the fall of the curtain—only infinitely sympathetic and happy. But that is because the dramatist has succeeded in creating a definite idea of life with which to leave us, as Hauptmann has succeeded in "The Weavers." Perhaps in *The Madras House* Mr. Barker has not succeeded in creating a definite idea of life, but has succeeded only in its episodic illumination. The play, although full of an extraordinary mastery, is not the most completely successful of Mr. Barker's plays.

All the work of the dramatist, viewed in its practical aspect, consists in the skilled deferring of crisis, but there is such a thing as the deferring of crisis too long. It is, one fancies, the particular danger of Mr. Barker's dramatic method. In each of his major plays there is a man who (in Alice's phrase of her Edward) "loves to think idly." These men who spend their time "thinking idly" have none left for anything more than a "momentary little burst of passion"—and when it comes it is unexciting to us as Trebell's. Mr. Barker's failure in *Waste* is not that he has failed to show us a man sharpened as a weapon to his purpose and wasted because of a flaw, but that, weapon and flaw together, Trebell leaves us as cold

as though he were really of steel. Now we have seen that the apparently idle talking of Mr. Barker's people is not in reality idle, but is contributing to the moment's necessary mood, in addition to being, incidentally, often quite delightful. But Edward–Trebell–Philip is in some danger of becoming merely a new form of raisonneur, whose function it is to defer the crisis by "shaking his fist at the world in general"—(the phrase is Jessica's for her Philip). Mr. Barker's people are very much interested in the world; they love to ask questions of it. This is the ground for the charge of self-consciousness against them. But they are not so much over-conscious of themselves, which is a horrid fault, as over-conscious of their world. The world is an abiding presence to them, not as it is to simple people, such as Synge's people, by contrast with their own small piece of it; not as it is to Pinero's people, who are eternally concerned about how their reputations will look in the eyes of their "little parish of St. James's"; but as it is to sophisticated and sententious people who join societies for the purpose of taking the world under their wing and keeping its feathers tidy. Does not Philip find it a farmyard world? Even Major Hippisley Thomas, that plain man, goes through life conscious that this is a damned subtle world. Jessica, that nice woman, finds it "a terrible world—an ugly, stupid, wasteful world; a hateful world." Edward–Trebell–Philip comes near at

times to uttering the national question, What Are You Going To Do About It ? of the great people Mr. Barker himself has satirized deliciously in Mr. Eustace Perrin State. But for the most part, we may conclude, Mr. Barker is on the side of the world, and makes clear very humorously his belief that it knows its own business best.

We shall not fully understand the mastery this dramatist has over the technique of his art until we have compared him with others. Ibsen himself may be caught hammer in hand in the act of driving home a point ; telling us something we must not miss, that is to say, with an emphasis that does his belief in us, and in the art of the theatre, no service. Over and over again in *Waste* there are things to be told just as essential to the play's understanding, and the dramatist is so secure of our attention in the theatre that he has to give it no more than the delicatest flick. There comes, " But since Mrs. O'Connell is dead what is the excuse for a scandal ? " and that is all we know and all we need to know. There was a time in the English theatre, not so long before, when the information, lest we overlooked it, would have been given to us in this fashion :

LORD CANTELUPE. But since Mrs. O'Connell—
FARRANT. Mrs. O'Connell ?
CANTELUPE. —is dead—
FARRANT. Dead !

LORD HORSHAM
BLACKBOROUGH
WEDGECROFT } [*together*]. Dead!

FARRANT. Mrs. O'Connell dead!

CANTELUPE. —What is the excuse for a scandal?

For the technical improvement, at least, in the contemporary English drama, the credit is more Mr. Granville Barker's than any other man's.

VIII

HUBERT HENRY DAVIES

MR. HUBERT HENRY DAVIES is the genre-painter in the English theatre. He entered it in the same year as Hankin did, but, since his own work is happily far from done, his place is perhaps not so clearly recognized, and certainly is not to be so conclusively appraised. And yet it is quite perfectly his own; for no other dramatist could have written *The Mollusc*. Hankin might have written it, in the sense that its idea is one that might have come to him, but he would not have written the same play. While he wrote it more wittily, perhaps, he would not have achieved quite the same perfect form; and this dramatist's peculiar tenderness, even in mockery, is not like Hankin at all. Nor has Barrie written an artificial comedy that is at the same time so completely a comedy of character. When we have said that it is not like any one of his more immediate competitors, we have but said that Mr. Hubert Henry Davies is an artist, whose plays are the dramatic expression of a personality

that is his own. In a theatre where successes are made by pooling one's abilities and dipping generously from the common stock, this dramatist has preferred to be himself and to be different; and his happiness is the happiness of Sir James Barrie, that, doing the work he has wished to do, he has yet found it to be fitted to the theatre's most immediate needs.

For the characteristic of the drama of Mr. Hubert Henry Davies is that it accepted the theatre as it found it. In his first play, Mr. Davies accepted too much; but even *Mrs. Gorringe's Necklace*, while it speaks to us of little save of its author's general aptitude for comedy, speaks in the tones that are his own. The play's framework, that is anybody's; Mrs. Gorringe's necklace may well have been hired out over the same counter as Lady Windermere's fan. But what could be clearer than that it is not Mrs. Gorringe's necklace that has caught the fancy of the dramatist, but Mrs. Gorringe? Who stole the necklace, we do not care at all; but we care very much for Mrs. Gorringe's reconstruction of the scene of the theft, with the assistance of the furniture in the drawing-room:

MRS. GORRINGE [*rises*]. I don't know. I can't think. [*Speaks volubly as she moves about describing the scene.*] I went to my room when I came in. You know how the dressing-table stands—as if it were there [*points to a table*] and the door, of course, is like this. [*Indicates the door, goes towards*

it, opens it, goes just outside, and then comes in again.] Well, I came in at the door just as I am coming in now. Of course I had my hat on. I closed the door [*closes the door and walks towards the imaginary dressing-table, talking all the time.*] Then I crossed over to the dressing-table in quite an ordinary manner. Just as I'm doing now. [*Stands before the imaginary dressing-table.*] Well, I looked into my jewel-case. I wanted to get some rings. These rings, in fact. [*Bends her hand to show her rings.*] I thought it looked different from usual. I couldn't think what it was at first, but I remember saying to myself, "Well, that's funny!" Then all at once it flashed across me, and I clasped my hands and exclaimed [*clasps her hands dramatically*]: "Great heavens, my diamond necklace has gone!" [*Drops the dramatic pose and tone.*] Just like that.

We like this circumstantial, feather-headed lady, and when, in the second act, we begin to be conscious that she is making preparation to enact her scene of reconstruction all over again, we like her still more; and not only like her still more, but begin to see that we have here a dramatist with a quite exceptional sense of form. Nor is Mrs. Gorringe a mere shaving from the floor of Wilde's workshop, any more than her hostess Mrs. Jardine, who, when the theft is announced, jumps from the postulate that it must be one of the servants to the hypothesis that it is Pipkin—"We haven't had Pipkin long, and she's always looking out of the window. I shouldn't wonder if *she* stole it"—an hypothesis which in her next utterance has astonishingly come to be invested with the sanctity

proper to fact. Wilde had a nice sense of the comedy value of the little things of every day; but he left this dramatist to have fun with a telegram, and to write this passage, so intimately laughable, about its mysterious dispatch:

MRS. JARDINE [*to* MRS. GORRINGE, *as she goes towards the door*]. Are you going to send the h'm h'm about the h'm h'm?

MRS. GORRINGE. H'm h'm.

COLONEL JARDINE. What's h'm h'm and h'm h'm?

In his next play Mr. Davies has fun with a lunch-basket, fun with an unoccupied house, fun with another little old lady who has, God bless her, very poor and unhappy brains; and the form is now the form proper to comedy—no more stolen necklaces, no more dropped handkerchiefs, no more suicides to make way for sudden happiness at the curtain's fall. *Cousin Kate* is still artificial comedy, but artificial comedy of a most curious and disarming intimacy. What could be better than the play's beginning?—we are genuinely interested in this "rather helpless little family," and prepared to be interested in the visiting Kate. And what could we hear about Heath Desmond that would, in spite of his apparent infidelity, dispose us towards him better than, from Mrs. Spencer, that "he used to get me quite hysterical every Sunday night at supper" (those Sundays that were in theory observed so solemnly)? That *Cousin Kate*

is artificial comedy, in spite of its atmosphere of pleasant truthfulness, is evident of course at the end, when, in order to leave the way clear for Kate and Desmond, Amy is handed over to "that *locum tenens*"—a conclusion emotionally unjustifiable as the conclusion to the comedy which went before.

Nor was there anything between *Cousin Kate* and *The Mollusc* to prepare one for a comedy that was quite perfect; but that is what *The Mollusc*, in its own genre, is. That Mr. Davies added to an eye for the little things of character an ear for the little things of speech, one knew; that he was essentially a man of the theatre one had only to remember the scene of Mrs. Gorringe's exits and entrances, or the opening moments of *Cousin Kate* before a word was spoken, to be certain. Clearest, perhaps of his qualities, was a feeling for form; a feeling that the theatre, just as it was, was good enough to do neater and more economical work in than the theatre men were doing. Well, *The Mollusc* is the perfectly effective and delightful expression of all these qualities. It is an artificial comedy of the most engaging naturalness; it is an entertainment of the theatre that is made up most economically out of the contributions of only four persons; it is a beautifully sustained trifle that is not too brilliant to be intimate, and not too superficial to be searching. How certainly is its genesis in character! There is imbroglio, there

is even intrigue; but these things, we are sure, are the inevitable outcome of the little lady who is the comedy's centre. This comedy is not "invented," not "built up," it is hardly even, like Hankin's, a comedy of idea; it is a kind of sudden sublimation of all that is most amusing in the vague, delightful women the dramatist had been drawing. Given the thought of a "mollusc," the dramatist's task was, as though she were a butterfly and not a bivalve, to pin her down. And this dramatist pins her down with a touch that is at once firm and gentle, a kind of affectionate relentlessness—the best of all touches for comedy. There is subtlety in his comic conception:

BAXTER. Is molluscry the same as laziness?

TOM. No, not altogether. The lazy flow with the tide. The mollusc uses force to resist pressure. It's amazing the amount of force a mollusc will use, to do nothing, when it would be so much easier to do something. . . .

And so we have the comedy, the taking in hand of a mollusc, and the force she uses to resist being taken in hand. It is the comedy of inertia. Throughout the first act, inertia is seen winning all along the line. In the second act, inertia wins again, in a pitched battle. In the third act, inertia is shaken; a miracle! the mollusc takes up her bed and walks. But do these miracles last?—that is the amused doubt we are left with as the curtain falls. The mollusc will be a mollusc still the moment this rude invading force has with-

drawn, taking the pretty governess with him; and her husband will be quite happy in her molluscry.

Now nothing could be more obvious than that this is a "conventional" comedy; the *status quo* disturbed by a breeze from the Colonies, the pretty governess, the parts "written for actors" (oh, yes, certainly Mrs. Baxter was written for an actress). But not written to order. One does not conceive the comedy of inertia to order. One waits and, God willing, it comes. Mr. Hubert Henry Davies waits, and these ideas do come to him. When he has not waited, they have not come, and all his care and humorous sympathy have not made these plays into *Molluscs*. He waited for *Doormats*, however, and *Doormats* came. There is a kind of play than which nothing is more stupid, and that is the kind of play that calls itself a fire-screen or a pen-wiper in the expectation that we shall pay our money to find out what is meant. We are allowed with ostentation to find out what is meant generally just before the fall of the first curtain, and for all else that the play holds we might as well leave at that point. This kind of play is a fraud and, one regrets to say, a common fraud; or, if you like, a trick; a trick to give freshness and "originality" to a piece that has been written to order. The plays of Mr. Hubert Henry Davies are not of this number. Nothing could be more delicate than the art with

which we are told about molluscs; and to leave the theatre when we have been told would be quite impossible, because that is not the play's secret—the play's secret is the wonders in the heart of Mrs. Baxter. There is no trick about *The Mollusc*, it is a comedy of character. And *Doormats* would be a comedy of character of equal interest and charm even supposing there were no third-act revelation of what the title means. This is not to say that the play's title is an adventitious label, carelessly or calculatingly tacked on. The dramatist has chosen to give unity to his comedy in his own way, that is all. It is the comedy of "dominants" and "recessives," and if Professor Bateson of Cambridge University had written it, no doubt he would have given it a more scientific name. But Mr. Davies' art prefers the more homely analogy of the doormat and the boot. Could anything be more delicate than the manner of its announcement?

JOSEPHINE. It's not that. It has nothing to do with strength or weakness. Some people have a genius for giving. Others a talent for taking. You can't not be whichever kind you are, any more than you can change your sex. You and I are amongst those who *must give*. [*Quaintly, as she resumes her sewing.*] Doormats I always call them to myself.

NOEL. I'm not a doormat—not usually—not in my business—not in my dealings with *most* people—only with her.

JOSEPHINE. Every doormat is not everybody's doormat. But everybody is either a doormat—or else—the thing that tramples on the doormat.

NOEL [*suggests vaguely*]. A boot!

JOSEPHINE. Yes. I always wanted a name for them. Leila is a boot. So is your Uncle Rufus. They can't help it. Just as every one is either a man or a woman—not in the same degree, of course—but there are *men* and *women* . . . [*illustrating with her hands*] . . . at either end, as it were, of a long piece of string; very mannish men at one end and very womanish women at the other. Then—as you go along—men with gentler, what we call feminine qualities—and women with masculine qualities—some with more and some with less—right along—till you come to a lot of funny little people in the middle that it's hard to tell what they are. Just so, it seems to me, is every one a more or less pronounced doormat or boot.

Could anything be nicer or more free from self-consciousness after the charming last-act development of this philosophic distinction, than the humour of its ready adoption into the conversation, just once or twice before the play ends? It is such a serious little conversation—serious to Aunt Josephine as well as to Noel that Leila should tread upon him and upon their marriage; and it is so seriously that Noel says, with half his mind engaged with Leila in the next room, "She wasn't always a boot," and so seriously that Josephine replies, "Oh, my dear! that's where they are so clever. Leila wanted your love, so she set to work the surest way to gain it. She pretended to be a doormat." . . . And again, just

the flash of higher spirits from Noel at the end, of Captain Maurice Harding, when Leila has found that if she is to go off with him and leave her husband she is not to go on her own terms—"He's a boot." To which Leila's reply is, "Oh, don't talk nonsense"—she isn't in the little secret, she doesn't know what a boot has to do with it, she can't share the flash of memory that is ours as well as Noel's; for it is no more than that, by Mr. Davies' delicate art, no more than a shared recollection whose perfect naturalness has nothing of the didactic, nothing of the curtain-warning epigrammatic, nothing for a moment that has to be "rubbed in."

And now to substantiate our statement that, doormats or no doormats, boots or no boots, the comedy of dominancy is a good one. Again it is, if you will, a "conventional" comedy—the husband, the wife, the second man, the pair of old people, the marriage that is threatened, the marriage that is saved just in time; an end that is a little arranged perhaps, but fundamentally truthful. But how perfect the unity that is secured by the old people being just such a pair, dominant and recessive, as the young people, only the other way round; how inevitable our quiet pleasure in waiting for the recessives, in the third act, to put their heads together; how good the surprise by which, when wife and willing-to-be lover come to the husband to put before him their

scheme for going off together so nicely cut and dried, the wife finds her new partner to be a dominant also, and that she doesn't like at all! How natural, too, all through, the humour which reveals Uncle Rufus in all his stubborn old dominancy, very much in the background although he takes such repeated care to put himself in the front. The comedy has just these five people, and, if we except Captain Harding, who has not much to do except look like a captain and come out as a dominant at the right time, each one of them is as firmly and simply and yet subtly drawn as *The Mollusc's* four. Everything is done with intimacy; what could be better done than this?

LEILA. Noel! Don't get up, Aunt Josephine! [*Coming down to* NOEL *with the card.*] Noel, dear, this man has called to see you. [*She offers him the card with her right hand.*]

NOEL [*instead of at once looking at the card takes her left hand and kisses it*]. Dear Leila!

LEILA [*smiling*]. That is my hand. This is the card.

NOEL [*smiling at her*]. Let's see who he is. [*Before he looks at the card he says*] You've got your hair done in a new way.

LEILA. D'you like it?

NOEL. Yes. I like that saucy little twist just there.

LEILA [*laughs and thrusts the card at him*]. There!

NOEL [*taking the card from her*]. What's his name?

LEILA. Mr. Welkin. I think he's an American by his accent.

NOEL [*reading the card*]. Elisha P. Welkin. Yes, he must be.

This is the first-act atmosphere, made by the

delightful young married woman who is willing, a little imperiously, to be gay and charming, by the husband who cares a great deal, and, because of their presence, by the pair of old people for whom the young married woman is a little more willing to be her gay and charming self than she is for the husband to whom she has grown used. The words of these people, and just the plain directions of the dramatist as to how they are spoken, contribute quite unerringly to the impression we are to receive from this scene. And then in the second act, when Noel returns from America unexpectedly, and finds Captain Harding in the house, the scene of tension is admirably done. "The situation is too much for Josephine. Finding everybody's attention upon her she is overcome with confusion and emotion and hurries out. They all see this. Every one is a little more embarrassed." How theatrical this might be; do we not know to tedium these scenes of collective embarrassment — until the Actor-Manager came to the rescue, with his masterly charm? How quite untheatrical it is; how simply effective, how moving even—because it is so truthfully imagined.

This distrust of the theatrical—of that which, hallowed by usage in the theatre, is employed by practising dramatists without imaginative consideration of its suitability or truth—is implicit in the best work of this dramatist. Because this

distrust is so little vocal, it must not on that account be missed. Because Mr. Davies' work is, in the best sense, "conventional," it will not do to fail to distinguish him from the crowd. This story of the affectionate husband who finds his wife growing careless, it is not a "new" story; and what is the theatre's advice to him?—why, that he should pretend to be careless too. Is that not the immemorial way, of proven efficacy—in the theatre? We may find a comedy of Mr. Somerset Maugham going exactly upon the lines laid down in a comedy of Sir John Vanbrugh. We have found Sir James Barrie re-proving the efficacy of the theatre's time-worn advice that if your husband thinks he is in love you cannot do better than give him a good stiff dose of his beloved. We may turn back from "The Ogre" of Mr. Henry Arthur Jones to read in "The Beaux' Stratagem" of Farquhar, "No, no, child, 'tis a standing maxim in conjugal discipline, that when a man would enslave his wife, he hurries her into the country." The theatre is full of these standing maxims in conjugal discipline and conjugal strategy, and the theatre-men take them up as they find them. How many comedies since the Restoration have not come to the same end as that to which Sir Harry Wildair brings his own,

> So spite of satire gainst a married life
> A man is truly blessed with such a wife?

But Mr. Davies, while still in their territory, does not take them up as he finds them, because he has something he prefers of his own. There is some one, sure enough, to give the theatre's advice to Noel in his predicament, but it is not the Actor-Manager, all-wise and all-managing, it is the thick-headed old gentleman who thinks himself such a fine man of the world. And what is Noel's reply to the theatre's advice: "Yes," he says, "but deliberately to set to work to make her jealous, it may be the clever thing to do—but it isn't sincere—it's not real—I don't like it." That is the dramatist's reply to the standing maxims of the theatre: they're not sincere, they're not real, he doesn't like them. We may find this distrust of the unreal in each of the best comedies of Mr. Davies: it is the secret of their freshness. Says Noel, "You can't turn round suddenly after breakfast one morning and become a new man—*à propos* of nothing at all"; but that is what the people of the theatre find no difficulty in doing. Says Leila, "He hasn't said one word of anything *real* since the day he came home. It's simply awful—the constraint between us." The constraint that we saw to exist between Mrs. Ebbsmith and Lucas would be something to this dramatist quite intolerable. And how is this passage, for its negation to half a hundred of the most cherished of the theatre's standing maxims?

MAURICE. Shall you tell him ?

LEILA. I shouldn't mind. I'd rather—in a way. It's more honest. But, of course, one can't. Apart from everything else it would hurt him so. That's really what I couldn't bear ! He has always been so good to me, and I'm so fond of him. [*Half smiles as she adds*] He's a very great friend of mine.

MAURICE. It's extraordinary how I don't hate him !

LEILA. Why should you hate him ? I don't see how anybody could hate Noel ! You'd love him if you knew him well. He's got so much character and he's such good company. I'm devoted to Noel—devoted ! It's so silly of people to suppose that a woman only falls in love with another man because her husband is either a brute or a fool !

" It's extraordinary how I don't hate him "—that is the theatre's voice, and quite properly ; Maurice has the theatre's obtuseness. " I hate him ! I hate him ! I hate him ! " like that, three times, is what he feels is expected of him to say ; but in the hands of this dramatist he cannot. In the hands of this dramatist the people we know well in the theatre, not greatly different to look upon, find themselves unaccountably speaking and acting the truth. When Captain Harding is asked by Leila's husband for an assurance as to his income, he says he will get his lawyers to draw up a " thing " in the morning—how unerringly would Sir Arthur Pinero have given us the right word !—the word that would be proportionately wrong. Nor are they afraid to speak out their intimacy, as the people of Mr. Galsworthy are.

This is the passage immediately following the husband's pathetically comical attempt to follow for a little minute the advice of the theatre :

NOEL [*he cannot resist her—he goes towards her, pauses, and looks down at her*]. It's been my fault too—mine more than yours. [*Drops on one knee beside her and says imploringly*] But oh, Leila—tell me—let me think ! let me feel—let me *know*—that it's all right.

LEILA [*drying her eyes as she looks at him and says*]. Yes, Noel—of course—of course it's all right !

NOEL. D'you *swear* it ?—that there's been *nothing*——

LEILA [*becoming restive and offended*]. I've told you. If you're not going to take my word—— [*Makes a movement away from him.*]

NOEL [*taking her hand and drawing her round to face him again*]. No, Leila—Leila ! Don't run away. I take your word. You say it's all right. I believe you. But I love you so desperately. I'm so jealous. If I thought that any one was pushing me out and taking my place—I'd . . . I'd . . . [*Dropping his voice almost to a whisper.*] No, no ! Listen to me. I shouldn't be afraid—only—lately—I've seen—for some time past I've noticed—it's not the same—not *quite* the same. There are little signs—little things that make me think—and then—you say something or you do something—something so sweet and tender—and then I think you *are* the same—and that it's only my fears and my jealousy and my love for you. You say it's all right. You say so ; I hope it's all right.

LEILA. Poor old Noel. Dear old boy, I wish I was more what you want.

[*He is kneeling on the ground beside her.*

NOEL. I wouldn't have you any different—but I *wish* we were back at St. Ives. Have you forgotten how it was then ? You are everything in the world to me still—just as you were then—just as I was to you *then*. Your

mind was given up to me—your hands were always finding my hands. When we looked into each other's eyes and kissed each other—I was enough—I was everything. What a long time ago that seems. Nothing can hurt me now, you said, neither poverty, nor age, nor pain—so long as I have *you*.

[*She dries her eyes.*

I have never forgotten that.

LEILA. I'm fond of you still, Noel.

There is nothing sentimental in that, because it is impassioned; because it is the intimate speech of sincere feeling, it has the rhythm which all good speech in the theatre may have; it is delightful to listen to, and, within and beyond the words we hear, is there not an emotion of aching pain that sets the scene, in its own small way, within measurable distance of Othello's cry, "That we can call these delicate creatures ours——"?

It is, then, this adherence to a basis in genuine feeling, together with their humour and excellent neatness of form, that gives to the comedies of Mr. Davies their distinct place in the theatre. Kate and Desmond, taking tea together in the untenanted house, came to the agreement that a love for little things was estimable, and that those are happy who retain it. "That's what gives distinction to their humour and imagination; a charm to the point of view." Since *Cousin Kate* the work of Mr. Davies has gained immensely in distinction, but throughout his work, even in the one or two plays that are frankly poorer, one does

not lose the charm of the point of view. "I never think what I think of people I like," says the young girl in the earliest play, and again, "What's evidence when you *know* a man?" This decision to *know* is quite Mr. Davies'. And then again, from Josephine, "It's no use *knowing*—with one's brain. . . ." Mr. Davies' comedy is not the comedy of brains; it is the comedy of exquisite sympathies. "If she feels your heart is towards her," says Captain Drew, "I don't think the words and the ways will matter much." Somehow we know that the heart of this dramatist is towards his people, and that is why he is successful in making us understand that the heart of Noel is towards Leila—it is not the words and ways that matter; it is the intimate sympathy of imagination. In Mr. Davies' comedy there is no contempt. Contempt cannot be indulged in without a certain lack of sympathy; and it is difficult to think that a lack of sympathy is anything but a lack of patient understanding.

Mr. Davies' comedy does not fail in patient understanding. "I don't pretend to be a critic," says Mrs. Spencer, confronted by the phenomenon of Kate's novels, and we like her all the more that she does not. The spectacle of this little old lady effecting an introduction, and after apologizing that she couldn't remember the one name, having to confess that now she has forgotten the other, is funny, but our laughter is with her, not at her.

And so with Mrs. Baxter's knowledge of the Latin language :

MRS. BAXTER [*complacently*]. I learnt Latin. I remember so well standing up in class and reciting "Hic—haec—hoc"—accusative "hinc—honc—huc."

BAXTER [*correcting her*]. Hoc.

MRS. BAXTER. Huc, my dear, in *my* book. And the ablative was *hibus*.

BAXTER. Hibus !

[MR. BAXTER *and* MISS ROBERTS *both laugh.*

MRS. BAXTER [*making wild serious guesses*]. Hobibus—no, wait a minute—that's wrong—don't tell me. [*Closes her eyes and murmurs*] Ablative—ho—hi—hu—no ; it's gone. [*Opens her eyes and says cheerfully*] Never mind. What were we talking about ?

Hankin's scene of Lady Denison at her German lesson is not funnier, but is not this quite free from the Hankin "fatuity" ? The mollusc fatuous ! —she is a quite gloriously, almost uproariously, successful little lady, whom we cannot hold contempt for if we would. Wilde might have drawn Mrs. Gorringe, with her "Now you're making fun again," or Mrs. Jardine, who was never mistaken in eyes ; Hankin would have liked the humour of Mrs. Moxon and the reading circle "taking" King Lear ; but Mrs. Spencer, who preserved the sanctities of the Sabbath with great care until she had her family about her at the supper-table, is a more kindly portrait of a lady than Wilde or Hankin was ever guilty of ; and Aunt Josephine neither Wilde nor Hankin

could have drawn at all. Nobody but Mr. Davies, perhaps, would have made so memorable Uncle Rufus at the breakfast-table, petulantly pushing a sausage or saying "I detest haddocks. That's well known." Nor are Mr. Davies' young women the mere "very pretty girls" that serve Hankin's comic purposes for the most part; Miss Roberts, the pretty governess, is near to the Hankin convention, it is true; but Leila Gale, the "delightful young married woman," is something very much more than this. Vicky Jardine, who leads to an amusing scene of suspended animation in *Mrs. Gorringe's Necklace*, is a very good portrait of the "flapper," with more of her own eager life than was allowed by Wilde to the young lady who had the pure taste for the photographs of Switzerland; while the young people in *A Single Man* are similarly studied for their own sakes. Mr. Davies is good at young people—one does not remember a better English schoolboy than Bobby Spencer, not even in Barrie. But Mr. Davies knows quite clearly where to draw the line—there is no child-exploitation in his drama. In regarding the exceptional symmetry of *The Mollusc* one cannot sufficiently admire the art with which the two little Misses Baxter are confined to their proper quarters, the schoolroom.

This dramatist has run with no "movements," and if he belongs to a school it is the teacup-and-saucer school and he is a master in it without, it

seems, any pupils. There is a beauty in the quality of quietly humorous acceptance, a quality we think of as feminine, and perhaps rightly, since in the novels of Jane Austen it finds its most full expression. If Jane Austen had been a dramatist, her comedies, one may fancy, would have been very like the best comedies of Mr. Hubert Henry Davies.

IX

JOHN GALSWORTHY

AN observer from the continent of Europe,[1] bringing to an end his survey of the English theatre in the year 1896, wrote that he would "have wished to determine the influence exerted by the contemporary German drama upon the dramatic movement in England, but I can find no trace of any such influence at all." Ten years later he could not have said so, for this was the year of *The Silver Box*. If *The Silver Box* showed the influence of Hauptmann's "Der Biberpelz," *Strife*, three years later, showed even more plainly the influence of Hauptmann's "Die Weber"; and this we might say, even if we did not remember that Hauptmann's play about the weavers was one of the earliest productions of the Court Theatre in the days when the dramatic art of both Mr. Granville Barker and Mr. John Galsworthy was in the making.

That Mr. Granville Barker learned something of the possibilities of the theatre from the "social

[1] Augustin Filon, *The English Stage*.

drama " of Hauptmann, and that Mr. Galsworthy, when he brought his faculties of carefully skilled observation to the service of the stage, learned both from Hauptmann and from Mr. Barker, are contentions that need only be proved in so far as their proof will help us to a more exact understanding of Mr. Galsworthy's own art. And even so the question of influences must not be made too much of. The transition from Ibsen to Hauptmann was an inevitable transition in the theatre. It may be quite broadly defined as the growing consciousness that there are more ways than one of giving to the drama that clear unity without which it cannot be good. Ibsen threw over the drama of Sardou and Dumas, but he did not throw over the central principle upon which they built their plays. Implicit in " Rosmersholm " as in " La Dame aux Camélias " or in " Diplomacy " is the belief that the only unity which can hold a play together is the unity of plot. Strindberg did not achieve another unity ; he worked unconventionally within Ibsen's, proving his ability, as in "Fröken Julie," to cut a plot in two and join it again without the usual interval. But in Hauptmann's first play we are conscious of a unity which is independent of plot ; a farm-house interior, with the living souls it holds, is the play's sufficient unity, altogether apart from any single action there, or the inheritance, as in " Rosmersholm," of any single action in the past. We might call its

unity a unity of being as distinguished from a unity of doing. The "naturalistic" school of dramatists, of whom Hauptmann is merely the most consistently distinguished, put the creation of atmosphere in the place of the complication and unravelling of plot. It is not a different or an exclusive definition of the dramatic, it is merely a wider definition. It may include "Othello" and "Mrs. Tanqueray," in which the personal drama gives the plays their form; but it may include also a play of group emotions like "The Weavers," in which there is no consistent drama of single persons. That the transition from the tyranny of plot was a natural and inevitable transition would be clear if the German Freie Bühne had never come into being, for as long ago as Ostrovsky, the theatre in Russia had proved itself to be as good a vessel as the Russian novel to hold the spirit of sentient passivity, a state certainly of being rather than of doing; and with Tchekoff the drama whose apparently simple but really very complex purpose is the creation of atmosphere came to its highest and most natural development.

The drama of Mr. Galsworthy is a drama which finds its sufficient motive in the fact that things *are*. That is both its strength and its weakness. The "social drama," one supposes, is written when the dramatist is less interested in persons than in groups, each of which may of course be, and in Hauptmann's play about the weavers is, in-

dividualized as clearly as any personal protagonists could be. But the protagonists are not persons—that must be the distinction. The protagonists of "The Weavers," for example, are small capitalism on the one hand, and, on the other, labour that is helpless to live its own life because it has not the means; its tragic pity is that life should get itself into these difficulties. The play is truly tragedy because, while life suffers like an animal caught in the toils, our sense of the beauty of life is made more clear. The social drama may find its complication in collective life rather than in the life of the individual; it may do altogether without unravelling; but it may not abdicate the function of the drama—which is to add to the wonder or beauty of human life an intensity of clearness—or it fails to be truly tragic, as the plays of M. Brieux fail. Its danger is that it may content itself with the exhibition of institutions or sink into the promulgation of theses. The drama of Mr. Galsworthy is rather studiously free from this second reproach, but it is not always free from the first.

For it finds the theatre in existence, and in the theatre—which for generations no man had thought he might enter without a clever plot invented or adopted—it proceeds to show us the peculiar interest of the things which exist outside. To a public of playgoers familiarized to tedium with

the exhibition of their own drawing-rooms—(or drawing-rooms just a little more splendid than they could ever hope to enjoy)—Mr. Galsworthy communicated his discoveries as to "how the poor live"; and with this difference, that whereas the drawing-rooms of the rich had not in themselves been held to be sufficient warrant to set the machinery of the theatre in motion, Mr. Galsworthy's drama needed no other motive to come into being than its skilful and sympathetic observation of the houses of the poor. These things are so, it said; you cannot therefore but be the better for knowing about them. There was thus in it from the first a something irrelevant to art, a something of self-sufficient didacticism that is not in the plays of Mr. Barker, and that is not in the social drama of Hauptmann. In "The Voysey Inheritance" the plot is certainly of less importance than the creation of a particular atmosphere, the atmosphere of a stable domesticity built upon commercial instability; but we are perfectly clear that Chislehurst is not brought into the play merely because Chislehurst exists as a phenomenon of some social importance. To Hauptmann a thieves' comedy is a study, of perfect sympathy and truth, we feel, in how the poor live; but they *are* thieves, and it *is*, quite undoubtably, a comedy. To Mr. Galsworthy a thieves' comedy is the contrast between a rich thief and a poor thief in the eyes of the law, with

extenuating circumstances in both cases, duly reported.

It is Mr. Galsworthy's purpose to go behind the morning papers, and to show us the rich store of "human interest" there. His claim upon us is that, if we follow him, we shall "understand." We follow him accordingly, into the police court, into a mass meeting of labourers, into His Majesty's prison cells. And the plays of Mr. Galsworthy are these things. The art of Mr. Galsworthy, we may say, is the art of skilful exhibition. It is when he comes to put form upon these various exhibitions that his difference from the dramatists we have mentioned is apparent. *The Silver Box* would have been far less good a play if there had been no silver box in it, just as the thieves' comedy of Hauptmann is inseparable from the beaver coat. But a kind of imaginative timidity made it impossible for Mr. Galsworthy to put the silver box to any use so strikingly integral as that to which Hauptmann put the beaver coat, when, for example, we hear of its being worn by the bargeman far out in the centre of the river. The silver box might equally well have been a gold tooth-pick, or a gold watch, or even, since the disproportionate severity of the punishment visited upon the poor is Mr. Galsworthy's theme, a watch of oxidized iron. Mr. Galsworthy's finished mastery of stage revelation in his first play—(the excellently apprehensive opening of his first scene will serve for an example)

—must not blind us to the fact that it is not really a play *about* a silver box. The silver box remains, after the play is done, a convenient pretext for having shown us some things which Mr. Galsworthy wished to show us, and it has not, even so, been made into a kind of inevitable symbol of these things as it would have been by a dramatist of stronger imagination. Now what Mr. Galsworthy wished to show us we know—a Liberal member of Parliament, a room in a tenement house, a London police court, a ne'er-do-well of the upper and a ne'er-do-well of the lower classes—accurately observed every one of them; but why did he wish to show us these things? *The Silver Box* is a good play, and not merely a series of accurate observations, because Mr. Galsworthy did very strongly wish to show us a social contrast. I suppose it may be said that whatever else the drama may exist without it cannot exist without contrast; nor any other of the arts, for that matter, since the very excitement of Whistler's Symphony in White is to observe the narrow limitations within which contrast has been successfully achieved. Mr. Galsworthy found the motivity to his first play in his pleased surprise—(an artistic pleasure mingled with a little humane pain)—at the different fates attending the ne'er-do-well of the upper and the ne'er-do-well of the lower classes, who are guilty of what is, in kind, exactly the same series of social offences. But this surprise

at the existence of social distinctions is not a very strong or lasting motivity to drama; it is a species of contrast definitely less stimulating than the eternal wonder at human differences.

Accordingly, contrast, which to Mr. Galsworthy's first play had been the motive, became in his later plays the method. Mr. Galsworthy's drama is the drama of social contrasts for their own sakes. Thus his strike drama is not about one Anthony and one Roberts; it is about the differing lives and fates of Anthony and his kind and of Roberts and his kind in a capitalist civilization when brought to the touchstone of industrial deadlock. The tragedy of Falder is not about Falder, but about the way in which we firmly entrenched ones put away the weak in the name of the Law, and forget that they are men. The play of country-house life is not a play about the love of the eldest son for the daughter of his father's gamekeeper; it is a play about the varying deference given to morality according to the degree in which two specifically contrasted cases involve the house's honour. Mr. Galsworthy has ranged far, but he remains the Mr. Galsworthy who wrote *The Silver Box*. That, as we have seen, was a comedy of discriminating treatment, and the personal colour by which it was his own was his feeling that the law's discrimination in favour of the rich thief was somehow rather wrong. By that, and by a not-very-far-to-be-sought didac-

ticism; so that in the table of the play which set out the household of John Barthwick, "a wealthy Liberal," we read of Jones, "the stranger within their gates," and were made to share Mr. Galsworthy's feeling that it was somehow rather wrong that the Joneses of this world should remain strangers within the gates of the Barthwicks. The Barthwicks were just a little culpable in that they did not even try to understand.

But at this point we have to balance Mr. Galsworthy's feeling that the social contrast is somehow rather wrong with Mr. Galsworthy's careful impartiality. First of all, he is an accurate observer; but next he is an observer who would like us to understand quite clearly that the accuracy of his observations has not been affected by any conclusions to which they may have led him, howsoever regrettable. Mr. Galsworthy is a dramatist who is anxious about many matters, but chiefly he is anxious to be fair. In his first play, lest we should too hastily assume that the right was all on the side of the Joneses, he made Jones beat his wife; and then, lest we should run away with the idea that, among the poor, a sex-contrast was being drawn all in favour of the women, he balanced a wife-beating Jones with a wife-beaten Livens. The young solicitor who makes out the cheque in a hurry and leaves a space after the nine is not angry or vindictive with the clerk who takes a pen and ticks in "ty";

he does his best to save him from prosecution. All the persons of Mr. Galsworthy's drama have a share in this extreme anxiety of their author to be fair. It is as though, having found the field of his drama in social distinctions, he had said to his people: "Now the dramatic contrast between you is in a sense ready-made. I should like you to be careful not to presume upon it." His judge, in summing up, is, within the limitations of his position, a model of fairness; the prison-governor who administers in a similar spirit the system as he finds it "can't help liking" the poor fellows in his care; even the constable who has to hale off to the police-court the pathetic little suicide, because it is the system, is a "good sort." It is part of Mr. Galsworthy's careful plan as a dramatist to personalize his institutions at their best. In the difficulty in which the eldest son of the Cheshires finds himself entangled, Lady Cheshire is far from seeing one side only; while Sir William, if he depart at all from strict fairness, is careful to explain: "I am speaking under the stress of very great pain—some consideration is due to me," and we give it. We always give to Mr. Galsworthy's people, administering a little apologetically the social system they find themselves involved in, the consideration that is due to them. That is a tribute to their successfulness. But as we give it we begin to understand what is meant by being "studiously fair." There

is nothing in Mr. Galsworthy's carefully preserved impartiality capable of adding to his drama so poignant a truthfulness as that of Hauptmann's old Hilse the weaver, who has good words for the manufacturers upon his lips until he is shot dead in his chair by a stray bullet that comes in at the window. We almost find ourselves guilty of wishing that Mr. Galsworthy would permit his people to be unfair for a change. The defect of Mr. Galsworthy's virtue of impartiality is that it has become self-conscious.

And now let us see how this drama of social distinctions works out in tragedy and in comedy. Both alike are marked by a kind of yearning intimacy. The sincere desire at the heart of Mr. Galsworthy's drama we are acquainted with: it is that we should *understand*. It does not much matter whom or what we understand, and so we are given William Falder, very small, in contrast with the majesty of the Law, very large. The tragedy is dependent upon the fact that things are so. It therefore works out rather easily. The dramatist's task is to show us Falder in a solicitor's office, Falder in the dock at the Central Criminal Court, Falder in the cells of His Majesty's prison, and the dramatist is perfectly capable of these scenes. Our tragic emotion in face of Mr. Galsworthy's drama would be expressed in some such words as: "Yes, I suppose that's quite true. What are they going

to do about it ? " We may go so far as to wonder quite actively what *ought* to be done. It is just the same with Mr. Galsworthy's comedy. Mr. Galsworthy has written a comedy of self-criticism, as Ibsen did in " The Wild Duck," and, perhaps with a memory of Ibsen, conscious or unconscious, he has called it *The Pigeon.* This is particularly revealing. People had been saying, perhaps, that Mr. Galsworthy's drama always asked them the question what they were going to do about it ; so he wrote a play, much lighter in texture, to make it plain that it was not what they *did* that mattered, but how much they understood. The people who are most ready with an answer, indeed, to what is to be done about the problem of poverty —the Canon, the Professor, the Justice of the Peace—are ridiculed, just as Halmar Ekdal was figured by Ibsen to indicate what he did not mean. What Mr. Galsworthy means is Understanding— " without that, Monsieur, all is dry as a parched skin of orange." His French ne'er-do-well figures the hopelessness of mere doing, and the little flower-seller, and Timson, once a cabman, figure it again. Wellwyn, the artist, is what, we fancy, Mr. Galsworthy wishes us to be : " It isn't sentiment. It's simply that they seem to me so—so—jolly. If I'm to give up feeling sort of—nice in here (*he touches his chest*) about people—it doesn't matter *who* they are—then I don't know what I'm to do." It isn't sentiment, and, in case we should

think so, the yearning intimacy is relieved deliberately with humours. The method is still the method of contrast, carefully pointed. The professor and the J.P. accuse each other of losing sight of the individual, and together they step out arguing into the night and fall over the sleeping figure of the drunken cabman. "Monsieur, it was true, it seems," we are prompted. "They had lost sight of the individual." If we think the dramatist to have travelled rather far from the less unsubtle refrain of the play about the silver box, "a poor man who behaved as you've done . . ." we soon find that Mr. Galsworthy on his defence is not really a different Mr. Galsworthy:

FERRAND. Ah! Monsieur, I am loafer, waster—what you like—for all that [*bitterly*] poverty is my only crime. If I were rich, should I not be simply veree original, 'ighly respected, with soul above commerce, travelling to see the world? And that young girl, would she not be "that charming ladee," "veree *chic*, you know!" And the old Tims—good old-fashioned gentleman—drinking his liquor well. *Eh! bien*—what are we now? Dark beasts, despised by all. That is life, Monsieur.

That is, at any rate, the motive to the drama of Mr. Galsworthy—the drama of social distinctions.

And this, when the flower-girl has tried to drown herself, is that drama's comedic complication, so far as it can be said to have one:

WELLWYN. Well! God in Heaven! Of all the d——d topsy-turvy——! Not a soul in the world wants her

alive—and now she's to be prosecuted for trying to be where every one wishes her.

It is a damned topsy-turvy world, not merely a damned subtle world, as Mr. Barker's Major Thomas would have it; and to place topsy against turvy is Mr. Galsworthy's way to make a social drama.

Mr. Galsworthy placed topsy against turvy to best effect when he wrote a play of social distinctions in excitement. *Strife*, by its subject-matter, is given the dramatic value of crisis in greater degree than any other of his plays. It was like Mr. Galsworthy to choose a case in which the men's trade union stood aside, so that he might have an impartial arbiter ready-made; and it is in Harness's concluding words, "That's where the fun comes in," that we find the dramatist's characteristic pitying aloofness rather than in anything so simple as old man Thomas's "Shame on your strife!" There is the same careful pointing of contrasts: the Directors' fire (Act I) against the men's fire (Act II), the Directors' meals against the men's meals, the Director's wife, who may miss her train to Spain, against the man's wife, who is dead. We "hear both sides"; sometimes the play takes on almost the symmetry of an argument: it still remains commendably unheated. *Strife* is a better play than *Justice*. The victim there Mr. Galsworthy did his best to personalize by showing him

to us through the eyes of his lover, in her words over his dead body at the end; but he remained essentially an impersonal victim of a system. The system in that case it was not possible to personalize at all. Here the struggle is personalized very cleverly by making each of its protagonists something more than a "party" man. Anthony is an extremist, as Roberts is an extremist; both draw something out of the common stock of life, and are the more men for that reason. It pleased Mr. Galsworthy to make them, rich man and poor man, draw the same thing; and life treats them alike. The scene in which they face one another, both thrown over by their kind, is the most strongly imagined in Mr. Galsworthy's drama; and at the same time, in its reliance for its full effect upon our knowledge of the differing defeat attending the poor man and the rich, typically Mr. Galsworthy's:

HARNESS. For shame, Roberts! Go home quietly, man; go home.

ROBERTS [*tearing his arm away*]. Home? [*Shrinking together in a whisper.*] Home!

Perhaps it is not difficult to see how Mr. Galsworthy incurred the charge of sentimentality which his nice little artist-man is at pains to rebut. "Monsieur," says the picturesque Frenchman who does his part in the rebuttal, "if HE himself were on earth now, there would be a little heap of gentlemen writing to the journals every day

to call Him sloppee sentimentalist!" It may be so; but still there must be something which dictates, for example, this dramatist's choice of Christmas Eve as the background for both comedy and tragedy, to show us Falder beating the door of his prison-cell and these birds of the Embankment despoiling their pigeon, when on any other night in the year the same things are. It is the choice of the ready-made occasion. "Christmas!" says the governor, and we are to contrast this greenish-distempered prison interior with the domestic fireside of our imagination's choice. We will not call this sentimental, we will call it the employment of ready-made emotion in the service of dramatic contrast. If we have suffered ourselves to be moved by it in Mr. Galsworthy's theatre, do we not remember that afterwards we have been just a little bit ashamed?

In the same way, much of Mr. Galsworthy's dramatic effect is aimed, if one is permitted to say so, just a little below the belt. It was to be expected that Mr. Galsworthy would choose to re-write "Caste," in illustration of the progress made by the English drama. But another dramatist would not have used the old play as he uses it, for purposes of quite so immediate a contrast:

STUDDENHAM. Wonderful faithful creatures; follow you like a woman. You can't shake 'em off anyhow. [*He protrudes the right-hand pocket.*] My girl, she'd set her heart on *him*, but she'll just have to do without.

DOT [*as though galvanized*]. Oh! no, I can't take it away from *her*.

STUDDENHAM. Bless you, she won't mind! That's settled, then. [*He turns to the door.*] [*To the* PUPPY.] Ah! Would you! Tryin' to wriggle out of it! Regular young limb!

[*He goes out, followed by* JACKSON.

CHRISTINE. How ghastly!

DOT [*suddenly catching sight of the book in her hand*]. "Caste!"

[*She gives vent to a short sharp laugh.*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

Freda is to have a baby by the eldest son, and of course there was a baby in the false old play; so Freda is brought in to assist at the young ladies' rehearsal, and when they appeal to her for help in the matter of the baby: "Borrow a real one, Miss Joan," she says. "There are some that don't count much." The conjuncture of the real and the unreal is there; but its intention is too apparent to be very poignant. We are not allowed, in any event, to feel with Freda very much. We are willing to; all Mr. Galsworthy's sympathetic understanding of the powers of truthful speech, all his excellent mistrust of the rhetorical, are in the scene of her avowal. Mr. Galsworthy's timidity, too, in the face of emotion, is there; but he has given us enough in the little scene, we need not quarrel about the fall of a curtain. Our quarrel is, if we wish to feel with Freda, that she is allowed to be no more than a line

in a diagram, a parallel line. Freda is a suitable object to be got "into trouble," that is all; because an under-keeper has got a village girl into the same trouble. Now that the offender is the eldest son, will the head of the household be quite so firm in his adherence to the dictate of conventional morality?—that is the drama. The upper class has one law for itself, it appears, another for its dependents. Again, it may be so; that it is so may even be right and necessary—the dramatist himself is perfectly willing to hear the case argued. Everything is even and impartial, and to pick a quarrel out of it would be difficult; but it is not likely that we shall do that, because we do not very much mind.

In Mr. Galsworthy's plays it is not character that really matters. The contrast he needs for drama is so ready-to-hand and so limited that types will really serve its purpose quite well. Character is added, it is true; but rather on Mr. Cokeson's principle, of making it all nice and jolly for us. Mr. Galsworthy's precision that is not quite portraiture amounts to little more than we may read in his stage directions: "Enid is tall; she has a small, decided face, and is twenty-eight years old." Thus Mrs. Jones is a charwoman who takes life as it comes, "of course"; and who speaks of her own work, when she can get it, as her "profession." Wellwyn is an artist who always smokes, "the despair of social reformers,"

who gives his visiting cards, his charity, and even his trousers to poor people because it makes him feel "nice in here." Miss Beech, the family dependent, is a dear old lady to whom men and women and worms are alike "poor creatures," each one thinking himself a "special case." Cokeson is a nice old man, who keeps dogs and goes to chapel out of office hours, and likes his dinner hot. This dramatist is always curious, always observant. And because Mrs. Jones's lot in life is a sad one, we are given, among the little accurate things she says, some at which we may smile; "almost quite drunk," she describes her husband to the magistrate. The husband of Mrs. Megan is not a bad one, but when he gets playing cards "then 'e'll fly the kite." "I see," says Wellwyn, "and when he's not flying it, what does he do?" All Mr. Galsworthy's characterization is curious and sympathetic and indulgent, like that. People are "so awfully human," in Wellwyn's phrase; especially poor people.

Mr. Galsworthy's stage directions seem to go upon the same principle of making things nice for us, rather than suggesting the spontaneous overflow of character eager to make itself explicit, as Mr. Granville Barker's do. But when we have disregarded what is added to make them nice for us, Mr. Galsworthy's people are, perhaps, over-simplified. We do not, for example, even the poor among us, move in quite so regular an orbit around the "personal"

and the "impersonal," their two fixed points, as Mr. Galsworthy would have us believe. Perhaps it is Mr. Galsworthy's determination to "understand" his people that makes them take refuge in impersonality so often. Or more likely, it is because they are conscious that they are speaking for their class, and that their creator has enjoined impartiality upon them. But Mr. Galsworthy's people always come back to an insistence upon the personal, as though to assure us by word of mouth that their identity has not been merged in the type; even the impersonal young girl, who is a favourite vessel for Mr. Galsworthy's well-known virtue of impartiality. Each one would have us know, with the hero of Browning's "Pauline," that he or she has a "most clear idea of consciousness of self." Mr. Galsworthy gets some of his fun, his rather deliberate fun, out of this, as when the curtain falls on his three reformers in *The Pigeon*, with their "My theory——" "My theory——" "My theory——" And the curious may see how part of the effect of personal interest in *Strife* is gained by making one and then another—the secretary of the company, Mr. Scantlebury, the women, Frost, the valet, John Anthony himself—narrow down the social conflict until only his own little part in it is apparent.

Mr. Galsworthy, with an air of discovery, once wrote a "Play on the Letter 'I.'" *Joy* is an

exception to much that we have said, in that it does not rest upon a contrast that is ready-made ; unless we hold the differing search for joy of mother and of daughter to be so. But that is a contrast, if of circumstance, of circumstance that is not merely social ; and that is the reason why *Joy*, though a pale little play, is in some respects the most interesting Mr. Galsworthy has yet written. Every one, we learn in it, thinks themselves a " special case," with this conclusion :

> COLONEL. I say, Peachey—*Life's very funny.*
> MISS BEECH. Men and women are !

That, we feel, is Mr. Galsworthy's discovery, and the motive to his plays : life, with its contrasts, is very funny ; men and women are " so awfully human " that he just had to show them to us.

But the art of dramatic exhibition is a minor art. It is the skilful employment of the ready-made. Just as Falder's prison-cell, we feel, and the procedure of the Central Criminal Court have their existence independent of any creative act of the dramatist, so it is with Mrs. Megan, the flower-seller, and Timson, the superseded cabman. " I don't want the old fellow to feel he's being made a show of," says Mr. Galsworthy's artist man ; we note the kindness of his heart, but we do feel that, just a little. We do feel that for Mr. Galsworthy's people to be " made a show of " is a consequence of his method. It is the rebellious-

ness of the material. The raw material of the plays is the mass meeting of the strikers, the procedure of a court of law; and, after the dramatist has put it to his purposes, it remains raw. The West London police court is not a difficult thing to "put on the stage," but it is a very difficult thing to put through the dramatist's imagination. That is why, in spite of all Mr. Galsworthy's earnest artistry, his plays in general have not set up their own quite satisfying convention in the theatre, as those, for example, of Mr. Barker and of Hauptmann have. A mass meeting of strikers is an awkward thing in exhibition; "the men form little groups," we read, and their conversation comes to us with the arbitrary selectiveness of Wilde's conversations in a drawing-room, as with the turning on and off of little taps. Similarly with the police court: the people speak "behind their hands" to one another, and their voices come to us quite plainly, while the usher calls for silence in ineffective effort to save the dramatist's face. Mr. Galsworthy has gone to reality for his drama, but he has served the new wine in the old bottles. Drury Lane has shown us many a police court thus. Mr. Galsworthy's sense of the stage is shown more surely in the little things: the ill-timed piping of the boy Jan in *Strife*; the moments when intimacy of emotion and intimacy of effect are happily at one, as when Bill "touches Freda's arms" as he

goes from the room to leave her with his mother, or when Sir William, facing the thing in all his life he has never been asked to face, grips the mantelpiece so hard "that his hands and arms are seen shaking." These things are good; singularly at variance with the things which seem to us merely fastidious, such as Lady Cheshire's distaste for the gamekeeper's hands in his moment of emotion —things which, at any rate, fail in the theatre of their intended effect. There are the things again that people do in unlikely places, such as the scene between Bill and Freda in the populous hall, and then, because they are people in a drama conscious of its reality, apologize for the unlikelihood. Some dramas are born formal, some achieve form, some have form thrust upon them. Speaking generally, the form of Mr. Galsworthy's drama is less the spontaneous expression of the drama's needs than a form self-consciously imposed. The tragedy of law is formless, so, two years after the conviction, form is imposed upon it, against all likelihood:

WALTER. "The rolling of the chariot-wheels of Justice!" I've never got that out of my head.

No, it is the dramatist who has not got it out of his head; Walter forgot it long ago. It is the same with the visiting cards in *The Pigeon*; we feel at the end that they are overstressed, lest we lose sight of the art by which their employment has given form to the whole. The

use of the old play to give form to the new play of social distinctions we have already seen; and the rather teasing cleverness of the end of *Strife* is another example of just the same thing.

The art which tries too consciously to conceal art is the art that does not succeed in its aim; and this, we feel, is Mr. Galsworthy's. His famous impartiality defeats itself when it becomes self-conscious; so far from the concept of an author being remote from our thoughts as the force which throws up and draws back the tides, it becomes very definitely present to us, and on its face we seem to see the "quaint little pitying smile" with which the twentieth-century young lady from Cambridge saw down the curtain on the comedy of her brother and the gamekeeper's daughter. These no less famous "curtains," which seem to hesitate to come down on anything that could possibly be mistaken for a climax, similarly overshoot the mark, for theirs is the art which, starting away from the theatre's unreality, has ended in unreality again. In the English theatre of the present day Mr. Galsworthy is undeniably among the pioneers; we cannot but be indebted to him for the work he has done: but in it there is something of the pioneer who, in his anxiety to be a pioneer, has gone so determinedly ahead of the main army that he has caught up again with its rear.

CHRONOLOGY AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

CHRONOLOGY OF PLAYS

The dates are those of production rather than of composition, except in the case of plays which have not been seen on the public stage in England. The titles of these are in italics.

1880 Hester's Mystery.

1881. The Squire.
Vera.

1882. Girls and Boys.
The Silver King.

1883. *The Duchess of Padua.*

1884. Saints and Sinners.
Breaking a Butterfly.
Deacon Brodie.
Admiral Guinea.

1886. The Schoolmistress.
The Hobby Horse.

1887. Dandy Dick.

1888. Sweet Lavender.
The Weaker Sex.

1889. The Profligate.

1891. The Times.
Lady Bountiful.
The Dancing Girl.
The American.

1892. Lady Windermere's Fan.
Salomé.
Widower's Houses.
Walker, London.
Judah.
The Magistrate.

1893. The Second Mrs. Tanqueray.
A Woman of No Importance.

1894. Arms and the Man.
Mrs. Warren's Profession.
The Professor's Love Story.
The Case of Rebellious Susan.

1895. Guy Domville.
An Ideal Husband.
The Importance of Being Earnest.
A Florentine Tragedy.
Candida.
The Benefit of the Doubt.
The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith.
The Triumph of the Philistines.

1896. Michael and his Lost Angel.

1897. The Devil's Disciple.
The Man of Destiny.
The Little Minister.
The Princess and the Butterfly.
The Liars.

1898. Trelawney of the "Wells."
The Manœuvres of Jane.

1899. Cæsar and Cleopatra.
The Gay Lord Quex.

1900. You Never Can Tell.
The Wedding Guest.
Mrs. Dane's Defence.

1901. *Iris.*

1902. The Marrying of Ann Leete.
Captain Brassbound's Conversion.
Quality Street.
The Admirable Crichton.

1903. The Two Mr. Wetherbys.
The Admirable Bashville.
Little Mary.
Mrs. Gorringe's Necklace.
Cousin Kate.
Letty.

1904. John Bull's Other Island.
A Wife without a Smile.
Peter Pan.

1905. The Voysey Inheritance.
The Return of the Prodigal.
Major Barbara.
The Philanderer.
Man and Superman.
Alice-Sit-by-the-Fire.
Pantaloon.
Captain Drew on Leave.

1906. The Silver Box.
The Charity that Began at Home.
The Doctor's Dilemma.
Josephine.
Punch.
His House in Order.
The Hypocrites.

1907. *Waste.*
The Cassilis Engagement.
Joy.
The Mollusc.

1908. Getting Married.
The Last of the De Mullins.
What Every Woman Knows.
The Thunderbolt.
Dolly Reforming Herself.

1909. Penelope.
Strife.
The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet.
Mid-Channel.

1910. The Madras House.
Misalliance.
Justice.
The Twelve-Pound Look.
Old Friends.
A Slice of Life.
A Single Man.

1911. Fanny's First Play.
The Dark Lady of the Sonnets.
Rococo.
Preserving Mr. Panmure.
The Ogre.

1912. Milestones.
The Pigeon.
The Eldest Son.
Overruled.
Rosalind.
Doormats.
The " Mind the Paint " Girl.

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